Without Any Compulsion: Reformed Baptist Covenant Theology, the Covenant of Redemption, and the Clearing of God from the Authorship of Sin

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Abstract

The distance between Reformed Baptists and the Reformed Orthodox is typically thought to concern only the argument between paedobaptism and credobaptism. I argue that it reaches to how the God who decrees all things stands toward the first sin. Reformed Baptist covenant theology, as confessed in the 1677 Confession (reissued 1689) and as set out by Nehemiah Coxe and Benjamin Keach, supplies the ground for an asymmetrical account of divine decree and human freedom. On this account Adam before the Fall had a real, creaturely power to stand or to fall, and his fallen posterity do not have that power toward the good. The account rests on two asymmetries: God is eternal and the creature is temporal, and innocent Adam differs from his fallen race. I argue four things. First, the Reformed Baptist covenant scheme marks Adam's trial and his race's fall as distinct epochs. Second, the Second London Confession deliberately sharpened its wording on the decree, on permission, on the Fall, where Adam is said to have transgressed "without any compulsion," and on the covenant of redemption. Third, those changes, carried through, clear God of the authorship of sin, by placing the covenant of redemption after God's knowledge of Adam's mutable fall, with the decree to permit following, all in eternity and not in time. Fourth, Augustine's four states of man are kept on the Reformed Baptist account in fact and not only in name. This account is my own argument, built on the order Coxe and Keach gave to the covenant of redemption and carried further than they took it.

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1. Introduction

Recently, after having written for my grandson a treatise on the explanation of the Biblical presentation of divine determinism and human freedom, all in an attempt to clarify the correct understanding for him, I researched Reformed Orthodox treatments from several authors including Paul Helm, Guillaume Bignon, Michael Preciado, et. al. That research left me disappointed and perplexed, reminding me of the distance, in some areas not normally or always recognized, between Reformed Baptists and the Reformed Orthodox, a distance typically only thought to concern the argument between paedobaptism and credobaptism. My disappointment led me to prepare this analysis for the sake of my grandson's clarity and real orthodoxy, such that I have attempted to explain the Biblical perspective on the issues of covenant theology, i.e. the Reformed Baptist understanding. This study will be of paramount importance for him and for anyone else needing to understand the distance I refer to here, a distance that robs the RO of a proper understanding of determinism and freedom, as well as several other less central issues. Here, I lay out these Reformed Baptist distinctives with the further plan of passing on my critiques of Bignon and Preciado in other documents. Though I agree with both on much, this will be the foundation for crucial areas of disagreement.

Only the Reformed Baptist position presents God as he is revealed in Scripture, as good, personal, gracious and merciful, just and wise, without being a tyrant, while also giving him control of all things including saving humanity in an act of pure simultaneous justice and grace, and according to an eternal covenant of redemption.

I say this because the Reformed Orthodox presentation of the decree, of the covenants and of man's status before and after the Fall makes a mockery of God's being personal, good, gracious and just. That is a hard sentence, and I do not write it lightly. I hold the Reformed Orthodox in honor, and on most of what they teach I stand with them. But the distance I named above is not a matter of temperament or emphasis. It concerns how the God who decrees all things stands toward the first sin, and whether the history the Bible tells, of a man made upright who fell and of a race that fell in him, is a real history with a real turning point or the unfolding of one necessity from the first day to the last. That is what this paper sets out to prove.

The argument runs as follows. Reformed Baptist covenant theology, as confessed in the 1677 Confession (reissued 1689) and as set out by Nehemiah Coxe, who was in all likelihood one of its chief editors, supplies the ground for an asymmetrical account of divine decree and human freedom.[1] On this account Adam before the Fall had a real, creaturely power to stand or to fall, and his fallen posterity do not have that power toward the good. The account rests on two asymmetries. God is eternal and the creature is temporal, so that the certainty an event has in God's order does not become a necessity in the creature's order. And innocent Adam differs from his fallen race, so that the same mode of freedom works over a different range in each. Reformed Orthodoxy, as its leading modern exponents state it, applies one modal rule to every creature in every state. It thereby

[1] The Confession is cited from its first edition: *A Confession of Faith Put Forth by the Elders and Brethren of Many Congregations of Christians … in London and the Country* (London, 1677), hereafter 2LCF, by chapter, paragraph and page. The 1689 reissue is the same confession; the paper makes no claim about variant readings in it. On the editors, see Samuel D. Renihan, "From Shadow to Substance: The Federal Theology of the English Particular Baptists (1642–1704)" (PhD diss., Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 2017), 137: "It is highly likely that Nehemiah Coxe and William Collins were the chief editors of this confession." Renihan is cited by the dissertation's printed page numbers.

flattens redemptive history, and it leaves itself without a full answer to the charge that God is the author of sin.

I should say plainly what I claim and what I do not. I claim that the Confession's changes from its parent documents are deliberate, for its own preface says that "some things indeed, are in some places added, some terms omitted, and some few changed," and that where its authors differed from others they "exprest" themselves "with all candor and plainness."[2] Renihan, whose account of their history I follow, describes their federal theology as "a conscientious modification and realignment" of the Reformed scheme they inherited.[3] I do not claim that Coxe, Keach or any other seventeenth-century Baptist held the whole account of God's purposes and of Adam's freedom that I give here. That account is my own argument. It is built on the order Coxe and Benjamin Keach gave to the covenant of redemption, and it carries that order further than they took it. Where they say something else, I say so.

The paper proceeds in this order. I first fix the terms (§2). I then set out the Reformed Baptist covenant scheme (§3) and show where it agrees with Reformed Orthodoxy and where it differs (§4). I turn next to the Confession's deliberate changes from Westminster and Savoy (§5), and to one of them in particular, the words "without any compulsion" in the article on the Fall (§6). On that foundation I argue that the covenant scheme, carried through, clears God of the authorship of sin (§7). I then ask whether Augustine's four states of man are kept or emptied on each side (§8), meet the strongest objection to my account (§9), and conclude (§10).

2. Terms

The debate turns on words both sides use in different senses: freedom, permission, necessity and the name of Augustine. I fix each term here and use it without change afterward.

By Reformed Orthodoxy (RO) I mean the Reformed confessional tradition of the Westminster Confession and the Savoy Declaration and of its scholastic theologians, such as Francis Turretin and Herman Witsius.[4] My charge is aimed at one account within that tradition, the flat modal account given by its modern determinist exponents Paul Helm, Guillaume Bignon and Michael Preciado. I use Witsius as an older witness to the same way of speaking. A minority of seventeenth-century Reformed Orthodox divines, Johann Heinrich Alsted, Ludwig Crocius, Franciscus Gomarus, Antonius Walaeus and Louis Le Blanc de Beaulieu, I count as allies within that tradition, because they supply the doctrine of God's knowledge on which part of my argument rests.

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[2] 2LCF, "To the Judicious and Impartial Reader," p. [5]. The preface is unpaginated; its pages are cited in brackets by count.

[3] Renihan, "From Shadow to Substance," 1.

[4] The Westminster Confession is cited from *The Humble Advice of the Assembly of Divines, Now by Authority of Parliament Sitting at Westminster, Concerning a Confession of Faith, with the Quotations and Texts of Scripture Annexed* (London: Printed for the Company of Stationers, [1647]), facsimile published by the Westminster Assembly Project, https://westminsterassembly.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/WCF-edition-3-W1429-WAPc.pdf, accessed October 7, 2026, hereafter WCF, by chapter, paragraph and page. The Savoy Declaration is cited from *A Declaration of the Faith and Order Owned and Practised in the Congregational Churches in England* (London: Printed for D. L., 1659), hereafter Savoy. In quotations from seventeenth-century printings the long s is printed as s; spelling and punctuation are otherwise as printed.

By Reformed Baptist (RB) I mean the Particular Baptists of the seventeenth century, whose Confessions of 1644 and 1677 and whose writers, chiefly Coxe, Keach and Hercules Collins, are my primary witnesses, together with those who hold the Second London Confession today.

For the covenants I follow Coxe's usage. The covenant of creation, or of works, is God's covenant with Adam in his upright state, and with all mankind in him. The covenant of redemption is the eternal "Covenant transaction, that was between the Father and the Son, about the Redemption of the Elect."[5] The covenant of grace is the covenant in which God offers life and salvation to sinners by Jesus Christ, founded on that eternal transaction. Keach folds the covenant of redemption into the covenant of grace as one covenant in two branches; I note the difference where it matters, which is seldom.

Limited ultimate freedom (LUF) is the name I use for the freedom I attribute to Adam, and I use it in this sense only. LUF is a creaturely freedom held within the decree and never independent of it. It is "freedom of ambition, desire, thought, action, and choice without coercion, specifically to pursue, want, think, act, or choose otherwise in the circumstances." It is ultimate within the temporal arena, in that the creature's choice is his own and not the product of a prior determination by God. It is limited by the causal antecedents of creation and the sustaining of creation, such that the creature is not the ground of his existence because he was created, and he was not consulted about his creation nor consulted about being sustained in his creation. In Adam, the limitation was one of grounding. Post-Fall the limitation of a will bound to sin is added. It is not compatibilist freedom, and it is not autonomy from God.[6] Adam before the Fall had LUF toward both good and evil. The fallen and the regenerate have the same mode of freedom over a narrower range. Wherever I call Adam's freedom libertarian, I mean LUF in this defined sense and nothing more; the word never means freedom outside the decree.

I borrow two modern terms without the theory attached to them. Regulative control is the power to determine which of two open courses is taken. Guidance control is acting from one's own reasons when no alternative is open. Adam had both. Fallen man, toward the spiritual good, has guidance control only.[7]

The permissive will is the will by which God allows what his preceptive will forbids.[8] In the Confession it is not "a bare permission."[9] It is a decree not to hinder, and it carries a purpose to order what is permitted. Turretin rightly says that it is "not simply that God does not will to hinder sin (which is an otiose negation), but that he wills not to hinder (which is an efficacious affirmation)."[10]

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[5] 2LCF 7.3, p. 27.

[6] Gerald Milton Smith, Jr., *God's Knowledge within the Decree: A Proposed Solution to the Quarrel between Divine Determinism and Libertarian Freedom* (unpublished manuscript, October 2026), §1.3, 14–15, hereafter GKWD. In this paper "libertarian" is used only of limited ultimate freedom (LUF) in the sense defined here. See also Smith, "Mutable, So That He Might Fall: Why Guillaume Bignon's Flat Compatibilism Fails in Eden" (unpublished paper, October 2026), §8, 11–13, hereafter "Mutable."

[7] GKWD, §1.3, 17. The terms are John Martin Fischer and Mark Ravizza's; I use them as labels only.

[8] GKWD, app. C.2, 309; glossary, s.v. "Permissive will," 324.

[9] 2LCF 5.4, pp. 20–21.

[10] Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison Jr., vol. 1 (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1992), VI.vii.7, 516–17. All English quotations of Turretin are from Giger's translation.

Two pairs of distinctions recur. The first is between the necessity of the consequence and the necessity of the consequent. Given that God has decreed an event, it follows necessarily that the event will be; but the event itself need not be necessary in its own nature. Coxe uses the distinction in exactly this way.[11] The second is between the composite and the divided sense. Considered together with the decree, a proposition may be true that is false of the creature considered in itself. John Norton puts it so: "The same action in a divers sence, is both evitable, and inevitable. Evitable in a divided sence, i. e. in respect of mans liberty, Inevitable in a compounded sence, i. e. in respect of the Decree."[12] Both writers set beside these a third: the necessity of infallibility, which they distinguish from the necessity of coaction, or force.[13]

The two asymmetries I have already named. The first is between God and the creature. God's eternal order and the creature's temporal order are two ranked orders, and modal status does not pass from the first to the second. That the decree makes an event certain in God's order does not make it necessary in the creature's order.[14] The second is between Adam and his posterity. Innocent Adam's power differs from that of the fallen race, and the covenant structure marks the difference as an epoch.

The four states of man I state in Turretin's form. The liberty of Adam was to be able not to sin; the liberty of sinners in the state of sin is not to be able not to sin; the liberty of believers in grace is to be able to sin and not to sin; the liberty of glory is not to be able to sin.[15]

Finally, by conditioned knowledge I mean God's knowledge, within his simple intelligence, of what a mutable creature would do under a condition that includes God's own supposed will to create, to uphold, to concur and to permit. This knowledge is never a cause or a motive of the decree. It is the knowledge in view of which the decree is formed.[16]

3. Part One: Reformed Baptist Covenant Theology Explained

3.1 Covenant as God's Free Condescension

For the Particular Baptists a covenant is not a natural relation between Creator and creature. It is a free disposition of God's pleasure. Coxe defines a divine covenant as "a declaration of his Soveraign Pleasure concerning the Benefits he will bestow on them, the Communion they shall have with him, and the way and means whereby this shallbe injoyed by them," and he insists that "it

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[11] Nehemiah Coxe, *Vindiciae Veritatis, or a Confutation of the Heresies and Gross Errours Asserted by Thomas Collier* (London, 1677), 91: "some things we see, are the effects of causes that work necessarily, necessitate consequentis; others of free agents, which are to us wholly contingent; yet do also necessarily come to pass, necessitate consequentiae."

[12] John Norton, *The Orthodox Evangelist* (London: John Macock for Henry Cripps and Lodowick Lloyd, 1654), 75.

[13] Coxe, *Vindiciae*, 91: "But this is a necessity of infallibility, not of coaction, and doth establish, not infringe the liberty of free agents." Norton, *Orthodox Evangelist*, 199: "The Decree puts upon men a necessity of infallibility, not of coaction, or compulsion."

[14] GKWD, §9.2, 281; app. A, 297.

[15] Turretin, *Institutes*, VIII.i.9, 571: "For the liberty of glory in blessedness is not to be able to sin (non posse peccare). The liberty of sinners in the state of sin is not to be able not to sin (non posse non peccare). The liberty of believers, in grace, is to be able to sin, and not to sin (posse peccare et non peccare). But the liberty of Adam was to be able not to sin (posse non peccare)."

[16] GKWD, §3.7, 94; §4.3a, 136; Smith, "Mutable," §8, 11–13.

is not from any necessity of Nature, that God enters into Covenant with Men, but of his own good Pleasure."[17] Adam's hope of a greater reward did "not result immediately from the Law of his Creation, but from the Disposition of a Covenant according to the Free, Soveraign, and wise Counsel of God's Will."[18] The Confession says the same in its own words: the distance between God and the creature is so great that the creature could never have "attained the reward of Life, but by some voluntary condescension on Gods part, which he hath been pleased to express, by way of Covenant."[19] Renihan draws the consequence. A reward of life for Adam's obedience "would have been possible only through God voluntarily condescending to make Adam's obedience meritorious for that reward," and so the covenant of works "was not Adam's natural state."[20] Turretin agrees that God entered into covenant with his creatures "through his infinite condescension."[21]

This point matters for everything that follows. If the covenant with Adam is God's free arrangement for a mutable creature placed on trial, then the trial is real, and its outcome is not the mere unfolding of a nature God had already fixed in one direction. A covenant that offers a reward on a condition presupposes a party who may meet the condition or fail to meet it.

3.2 The Covenant of Creation: Adam on Trial

Coxe calls the first covenant "the Covenant of Creation, which God made with Adam in his upright State, and with all Mankind in him."[22] Adam stood in "a state of Tryal in a way to eternal Happiness, under a Law of Works and exercise of Obedience," with "the Promise of an eternal Reward, on condition of his perfect Obedience to these Laws."[23] He was "capable of, and made for, a greater Degree of Happiness then he immediately enjoyed."[24]

Coxe states Adam's freedom in strong terms. "Under this Covenant Man was left to the Freedom of his own Will; It was in his own Power and Choice, either to obey, and be eternally happy, or to sin and so expose himself to eternal Misery." Adam was "not so confirmed in Grace, as that he could not sin and dye," but was "indued with that Power, and Rectitude of Nature, as that he might not have sinned, nor ever dyed." He had the ability not to sin, though not the inability to sin. He was "a perfect tho' a mutable Creature," and "his Mutability becomes the Original of that Original Sin, whereby himself, and in him the World of Mankind, were ruined and made miserable."[25] In his reply to Thomas Collier he says the same of the first sin: it was a "sin, that man might not have committed; he might have helped it if he would."[26]

The other Baptist writers agree in substance. Keach writes that God "gave him power to stand in that happy Estate, tho he left him in a possibility of Falling to prove his Fidelity and Obedience to

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[17] Nehemiah Coxe, *A Discourse of the Covenants That God Made with Men before the Law* (London: J. D. for Nathaniel Ponder and Benjamin Alsop, 1681), 6, 7.

[18] Coxe, *Discourse*, 28.

[19] 2LCF 7.1, p. 26; compare WCF 7.1, p. 15.

[20] Renihan, "From Shadow to Substance," 141, 177.

[21] Turretin, *Institutes*, VIII.iii.1, 574.

[22] Coxe, *Discourse*, 12.

[23] Coxe, *Discourse*, 21–22.

[24] Coxe, *Discourse*, 25; Renihan, "From Shadow to Substance," 178.

[25] Coxe, *Discourse*, 29–30: "tho' he had not a non posse peccare, and so a non posse mori; yet he had a posse non peccare, and so a posse non mori." Compare the chapter summary, 15–16: "Man left to the freedom of his own Will under it; his mutability, the original of Sin."

[26] Coxe, *Vindiciae*, 74.

his Maker," and that "Adam before the Fall had Power to answer this Covenant of perfect righteousness."[27] Collins's catechism of 1680 teaches that "God had made Man such a one as he might perform it," and his verse history of the gospel says of Adam that his will "was free, at liberty, / To be unjust or right."[28] This is the first epoch of redemptive history. My later argument depends on taking it at face value.

3.3 The Covenant of Redemption: The Eternal Ground

Coxe places the eternal counsel to redeem in view of the foreseen Fall. "The infinitely Wise and Gracious God, who from Eternity foresaw the Fall of Man, had also from Eternity a gracious Purpose in himself, according to the Counsel of his own Will, to redeem and save a Remnant of lost Mankind from their lapsed and fallen State." And "these eternal Counsels that were hid with himself, were transacted in a way of Covenant between the Father and the Son, even in a Covenant of Redemption now revealed in the Scriptures of Truth."[29] In the *Vindiciae* he says that the elect "were chosen then in Christ considered as one that had undertaken to be a Mediator betwixt God and men," and he speaks of the salvation "of a certain number of the posterity of fallen Man."[30]

Keach gives the same order. The covenant was made "before the World began; God foreseeing Man would fall from his First Estate, and break his Covenant, and so plunge himself and all his Posterity under Divine Wrath and Misery."[31] Elsewhere he sets the same order as a proposition: "That God foresaw from Eternity, that Man would fall," for without "a War foreseen, there could I say, be no occasion of a Covenant of Peace and Reconciliation."[32] The motive is not the foreseen war. "The grand Motive that moved God to enter into this Covenant of Peace" is "His Love and Mercy."[33] Christ's suretyship, he writes, "was part of the Result of God's eternal Counsel; yet this Office of his may be considered as subsequent to Man's Obligation."[34] Collins sings of the "Counsels of Love, in Heaven above, / With Father, Son, and Spirit."[35]

Both men insist that the covenant is eternal and that only its revelation is in time. Keach says that the "Rise, and Constitution" of the covenant "was from Eternity, tho' the Revelation, and Publication, was in Time," and that "the Stipulation of the Covenant of Grace, was from Eternity, and the Revelation of it was in time, and not till Man had sinned."[36] Scripture speaks the same way of a purpose and grace "which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began."[37]

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[27] Benjamin Keach, *The Display of Glorious Grace; or, The Covenant of Peace Opened* (London: S. Bridge, 1698), 11, 16.

[28] Hercules Collins, *An Orthodox Catechism* (London, 1680), 4; Collins, *The Marrow of Gospel-History* (London: printed for the author, 1696), 6.

[29] Coxe, *Discourse*, 36–37; see Renihan, "From Shadow to Substance," 179.

[30] Coxe, *Vindiciae*, 16, 29.

[31] Benjamin Keach, *The Everlasting Covenant, a Sweet Cordial for a Drooping Soul* (London, 1693), 4.

[32] Keach, *Display of Glorious Grace*, 9–10.

[33] Keach, *Display of Glorious Grace*, 8.

[34] [Benjamin Keach and Thomas DeLaune], *Tropologia, or, A Key to Open Scripture Metaphors* (London: John Richardson and John Darby for Enoch Prosser, 1681), bk. II, 92. Books II and III are Keach's.

[35] Collins, *Marrow of Gospel-History*, 16–17.

[36] Keach, *Everlasting Covenant*, preface, and 11.

[37] 2 Tim. 1:9 (ESV). Compare Eph. 1:4 (ESV): "even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world."

3.4 The Covenant of Grace: Promised, Revealed by Farther Steps, Established in Christ

The Second London Confession grounds the covenant of grace in that eternal transaction. The covenant "is revealed in the Gospel; first of all to Adam in the promise of Salvation by the seed of the woman, and afterwards by farther steps, untill the full discovery thereof was compleated in the new Testament; and it is founded in that Eternal Covenant transaction, that was between the Father and the Son, about the Redemption of the Elect."[38] Coxe, for his part, sends his readers to John Owen's exposition of Hebrews, "especially in the Exposition of the 8th Chapter."[39] There Owen distinguishes the covenant of grace as promised from the new covenant as formally established. Under the Old Testament the covenant of grace "consisted only in a promise," and by "the new covenant" Owen means "its actual establishment in the death of Christ." The first covenant, by contrast, "was immediate, without the interposition of a mediator."[40]

Renihan identifies the Baptists' "complete avoidance of distinguishing the covenant of grace into two historical administrations" as the key difference between their confession and its parents, and he summarizes their view: the covenant of grace "should not be flattened into two administrations," but "should be seen through 'farther steps.'"[41] The scheme therefore has a historical shape. It runs from Adam on trial, to Adam fallen, to the promise, to the farther steps, to the fulfilment in Christ. Each stage is a real stage.

3.5 Coxe and Keach: One Order, Two Vocabularies

Coxe keeps the covenant of redemption distinct from the covenant of grace. Keach does not. "I cannot see that they are Two distinct Covenants, but both one and the same glorious Covenant of Grace, only consisting of Two Parts, or Branches."[42] Renihan judges that when Keach's covenant of grace is compared with the view of those who held the covenant of redemption as distinct, "the differences are nominal."[43] I use both men because both give the same order: the foreseen Fall, the eternal covenant between the Father and the Son, and the revelation of that covenant in time. Coxe deserves special weight, both because he wrote a full Particular Baptist treatment of the covenants before the law and because, in Renihan's judgment, he was "highly likely" to have been one of the chief editors of the 1677 Confession.[44]

4. Part Two: How Reformed Baptist Covenant Theology Differs from Reformed Orthodoxy

4.1 Where They Agree

Fairness requires that I state the common ground first. Renihan finds that the Particular Baptists "confessed the Reformed doctrine of the covenant of works," and that on this doctrine "there was

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[38] 2LCF 7.3, p. 27. The first promise is Gen. 3:15 (ESV): "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

[39] Coxe, *Discourse*, "To the Reader," referring to "Dr. Owen's 3d Vol. upon the Hebrews."

[40] John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold, vol. 23 (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, [1855]), 59, 74–75.

[41] Renihan, "From Shadow to Substance," 144.

[42] Keach, *Everlasting Covenant*, 6.

[43] Renihan, "From Shadow to Substance," 241; see 239.

[44] Renihan, "From Shadow to Substance," 137; see n. 1.

no difference between the camps."[45] The covenant theology they had learned from the Reformed tradition, he concludes, "did not need to be rebuilt, but refined."[46] The doctrine of the will in the ninth chapter, with its four states, is the same in substance in all three confessions.[47] The language of permission and the denial that God is the author of sin are shared by Norton, Turretin, Witsius and Coxe alike. Norton writes that "The Decree is the antecedent, not the cause of sin," and that God "neither is, nor can be, the Author of sin."[48] Turretin holds that "he only can be esteemed the author of sin who decrees and wills sins as to efficiency and approbation, not however as to permission and ordination only."[49] Witsius calls the charge "such dreadful blasphemy, that the thought cannot, without horror, be entertained by any christian."[50]

So the difference is not that one side affirms these things and the other denies them. It lies in the structure that holds them together, and in how consistently that structure is applied.

4.2 The Structural Difference

Westminster speaks of one covenant of grace "differently administred in the time of the Law, and in the time of the Gospel," and concludes, "There are not therefore Two Covenants of Grace, differing in substance, but one and the same, under various dispensations."[51] The Second London Confession leaves out those paragraphs and speaks instead of "farther steps." Renihan observes that the difference "has less to do with what the Particular Baptists said, and more to do with what they did not say," and that 7.3 confesses a covenantal model that "intentionally departs" from the standard federal scheme of its day.[52]

From this I draw an inference of my own. A covenant theology built on epochs, rather than on one substance in two administrations, is better suited to mark the Fall as an epoch. If the covenant of grace is one substance in two administrations, the eye is drawn to what stays the same. If it is revealed by farther steps, the eye is drawn to the steps, and the first and greatest step in the history of man is the step from innocence to sin.

4.3 The Epochal Difference This Paper Argues

The Second London Confession closes its paragraph on the covenant of grace with a contrast: "Man being now utterly uncapable of acceptance with God upon those terms, on which Adam stood in his state of innocency."[53] Coxe likewise says that after the Fall "there was in him now neither Power, nor Will to enter in thereat; He was utterly disabled from obeying God acceptably upon any Terms, until made a new Creature."[54] With fallen Adam "there was no formal and express Covenant-Transaction"; God "dealt with him only as a private Person," and yet "The Law of

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[45] Renihan, "From Shadow to Substance," 142, 179.
[46] Renihan, "From Shadow to Substance," 248; see 250.
[47] WCF 9.2–9.5, p. 20; 2LCF 9.2–9.5, pp. 35–36.
[48] Norton, *Orthodox Evangelist*, 52.
[49] Turretin, *Institutes*, VI.viii.10, 532.
[50] Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants between God and Man*, trans. William Crookshank, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: Thomas Turnbull, 1803), I.viii.28, 150.
[51] WCF 7.5, p. 16; 7.6, p. 17.
[52] Renihan, "From Shadow to Substance," 144, 146.
[53] 2LCF 7.3, p. 27.
[54] Coxe, *Discourse*, 35–36.

Creation binds, when the Covenant of Creation is broken."[55] The line between Adam's two states is drawn in the structure of the covenants themselves.

The modern Reformed Orthodox accounts I oppose apply one modal rule across every state. Asked whether Satan, Adam and Eve, unregenerate sinners or Christians ever had a categorical ability to choose otherwise, Bignon answers that "Calvinists should say 'no' to all of these, and nothing bad follows from that."[56] Preciado gives the reason the Reformed deny the ability to do otherwise: "It is not the case that an agent has the ability to do otherwise than what God has decreed, foreknew and controls by his providence."[57] The decree is the reason the alternative is absent, and the rule is not indexed to any epoch. Helm, who wrote the foreword to both books, frames his own inquiry so that the states drop out. He writes that "we are to be concerned with human choice, human agency as such, … and not with the nature of such agency when fallen, or as enjoying the Spirit's work of regeneration." "So we are concerned with a feature of human nature as such, not with soteriology."[58] I cite Helm's words for what they say. That his project, so framed, yields a flat account of freedom across the states is my inference from them.

Here, then, is the difference I argue. The Reformed Baptist approach follows the Bible's history. God made man upright, and man fell.[59] "Sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin."[60] The modern Reformed Orthodox approach reads that history through a logical system that removes its turning point. The turning point is still named, but it no longer changes the relation of the will to the decree.

4.4 The Limits of the Historical Case

I must say plainly what the seventeenth-century sources do not give. Renihan places the Particular Baptist distinctive in the structure of the covenants. He does not treat permission, the authorship of sin, Adam's liberty or the order of the decrees. Coxe himself defines liberty as "a rational spontaneity: He acts freely, that is under no coaction (which alone is opposed to liberty in the true notion thereof) … So that one that acts necessarily may yet act most freely."[61] In this he follows Norton, who denies that the liberty of the second cause consists "in a power of indifferency, to act or not to act: independent of, and not subordinate unto the Decree," and who writes that "Man acts as freely, as if there were no decree; yet as infallibly, as if there were no liberty."[62] The 1644

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[55] Coxe, *Discourse*, 43, 44.

[56] Guillaume Bignon, "A Critical Review and Fairly Comprehensive Refutation of 'Human Freedom, Divine Knowledge, and Mere Molinism' by Timothy A. Stratton" (Association Axiome, December 2020), 42, https://theologui.blogspot.com/2020/12/response-to-tim-stratton.html, accessed October 7, 2026. I have answered this at length in "Mutable," §§1–5, 1–7.

[57] Michael Patrick Preciado, *A Reformed View of Freedom: The Compatibility of Guidance Control and Reformed Theology*, foreword by Paul Helm (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2019), Introduction, quoted in GKWD, §2.1, 43–44. See my discussion in Smith, "The Fall Has a Date: Why Preciado's Symmetric Semi-Compatibilism Collapses into Fatalism" (unpublished paper, October 2026), §2, 1–3, hereafter "Fall Has a Date."

[58] Paul Helm, *Reforming Free Will: A Conversation on the History of Reformed Views* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Mentor, 2020), 30, 31; see 27 for his account of compatibilism.

[59] Eccl. 7:29 (ESV): "See, this alone I found, that God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes."

[60] Rom. 5:12 (ESV).

[61] Coxe, *Vindiciae*, 64.

[62] Norton, *Orthodox Evangelist*, 74, 76.

Baptists, for their part, disclaimed the charge of "holding Free-will," which concerned fallen man.[63]

I therefore do not claim that the seventeenth-century Baptists taught LUF. I argue that their covenant structure and their confessional wording lead to it when carried through, and that the account they themselves gave of Adam, a man left to the freedom of his own will, with power and choice to obey or to sin, says more than their definition of liberty was built to carry.

5. Part Three: The Confession's Deliberate Changes

5.1 A Confession of Agreement

The 1677 Confession was written to show agreement. Its preface says that the authors kept "the same order" as their parent documents, and that they made "use of the very same words with them both, in these articles (which are very many) wherein our faith and doctrine is the same with theirs." They did this "to manifest our consent with both, in all the fundamental articles of the Christian Religion," and "to convince all, that we have no itch to clogge Religion with new words."[64] The preface names its occasions. Prejudice had been raised against them by "the strange representation of them," and they wished to show themselves "no way guilty of those Heterodoxies and fundamental errors, which had too frequently been charged upon us without ground," and so to give "a testimony to the world."[65] In the same years Thomas Collier, a Baptist, was teaching, among other errors, "that man is able to believe the gospel of his own power, apart from the work of the Holy Spirit." As Renihan puts it, "The Particular Baptists desperately needed a public defense and declaration of their orthodoxy."[66]

The preface does not mention persecution. It states consent and the clearing of charges, and nothing more. Yet the setting is plain. After the Restoration "a series of Acts passed by Parliament, often known as the Clarendon Code, squandered all hopes of toleration for nonconformity"; "Many Baptist ministers and congregants were imprisoned. Property was confiscated. Fines were imposed." Under Charles II the Particular Baptists "were often fighting for their survival," and "In this time of persecution and dispersion there was a great need for unification and cooperation." Renihan sums up the period as one of "persecution and oppression, confusion and confession."[67] That the danger of those years gave the editors added reason to stress their agreement with Westminster and Savoy is my inference from that setting, not a statement of the preface.

This makes the changes all the more telling. A document written to show agreement, by men with every reason to keep close to the words of their parent documents, will depart from those words only where its authors judged that they had to. The preface admits such departures: "some things indeed, are in some places added, some terms omitted, and some few changed." It insists that they are not unsound. And it adds, "In those things wherein we differ from others, we have exprest our

[63] The 1644 preface as quoted in Renihan, "From Shadow to Substance," 83.
[64] 2LCF, "To the Judicious and Impartial Reader," pp. [3]–[5].
[65] 2LCF, "To the Judicious and Impartial Reader," pp. [1]–[2].
[66] Renihan, "From Shadow to Substance," 134, 137. Coxe's *Vindiciae Veritatis* (1677) is his reply to Collier.
[67] Renihan, "From Shadow to Substance," 114, 115, 133, 147.

selves with all candor and plainness."[68] Where the editors set out to copy, every departure is a choice.

5.2 The Changes Set Out

The departures that bear on the decree, the Fall and the covenants are these. I set them beside the Westminster text, with the Savoy text where it matters, and I list after them the articles that bear on my argument and were not changed.[69]

Article	The 1677 wording	Compared with Westminster and Savoy
3.1	God "hath Decreed in himself"; "neither the author of sin, nor hath fellowship with any therin"; "in which appears his wisdom in disposing all things, and power, and faithfulness in accomplishing his Decree" (p. 13)	WCF 3.1 (p. 8) has "did … ordaine," lacks the denial of "fellowship," and lacks the closing clause
3.3	"some men and Angels, are predestinated, or fore-ordained to Eternal Life, through Jesus Christ … others being left to act in their sin to their just condemnation" (p. 14)	WCF 3.3 (p. 9): "others fore-ordained to everlasting death"; the 1677 wording follows the 1644 Confession, art. III
3.5	election "without any other thing in the creature as a condition or cause moving him thereunto" (pp. 14–15)	WCF 3.5 (p. 9) lists "fore-sight of Faith, or Good-works, or perseverance in either of them"
WCF 3.7	omitted	WCF 3.7 (p. 10): God was pleased "to passe by; and, to ordain them to dishonour and wrath, for their sin"
4.1	adds "rendring them fit unto that life to God, for which they were Created" (p. 17)	not in WCF 4.1
5.4	"his determinate Councel extendeth it self even to the first fall, and all other sinful actions"; "(and that not by a bare permission)"; "the sinfulness of their acts proceedeth only from the Creatures" (pp. 20–21)	WCF 5.4 (pp. 12–13): "the first Fall, and all other sinnes"; "the sinfulnesse thereof"; "determinate Councel" is Savoy's wording
6.1	Adam "without any compulsion, did wilfully transgress the Law of their Creation … which God was pleased according to his wise and holy Councel to permit, having purposed to order it, to his own glory" (pp. 23–24)	WCF 6.1 (p. 14) lacks "without any compulsion"; Savoy 6.1 (p. 6) drops the permission sentence
6.3	posterity "now conceived in Sin, and by nature children of wrath, the servants of Sin … unless the Lord Jesus set them free" (pp. 24–25)	not in WCF 6.3
7.2	"Man having brought himself under the curse of the Law by his fall, it pleased the Lord to make a Covenant of Grace" (pp. 26–27)	WCF 7.2 (p. 15), defining the covenant of works, omitted
7.3	the covenant of grace "founded in that Eternal Covenant transaction"; "the posterity of fallen Adam"; "upon those terms, on which Adam stood in his state of innocency" (p. 27)	new paragraph; WCF 7.4–7.6 omitted
8.1	the Son chosen "according to the Covenant made between them both" (p. 28)	Savoy 8.1 (p. 7) has "a Covenant"; WCF 8.1 (p. 17) lacks the clause
9.1	"natural liberty, and power of acting upon choice"; "nor by any necessity of nature determined" (p. 35)	WCF 9.1 (p. 20) has "naturall liberty" only, and "any absolute necessity of nature"
9.2	"but yet was mutable, so that he might fall from it" (p. 35)	WCF 9.2 (p. 20): "but yet, mutably"

[68] 2LCF, "To the Judicious and Impartial Reader," p. [5].

[69] All wording and pages are from the editions of 2LCF (1677), WCF ([1647]) and Savoy (1659) cited above.

Article	The 1677 wording	Compared with Westminster and Savoy
19.1	God gave to Adam "a Law" (pp. 62–63)	WCF 19.1 (p. 32): "a Law, as a Covenant of Works"; the 1677 text keeps the name at 19.6 and 20.1 (p. 67)
Unchanged	3.2, no decree "because he foresaw it as future"; 4.2, "left to the liberty of their own will, which was subject to change"; 9.3–9.5, the will in the states of sin, grace and glory (pp. 13–14, 17–18, 35–36)	as in WCF

5.3 Reading the Pattern

The changes cluster around three points: the decree respecting the lost (3.3 and the omission of WCF 3.7), God's relation to sin (3.1, 5.4, 6.1), and the covenant structure that ties redemption to the fallen race (7.2, 7.3, 8.1). The 3.3 change is not an innovation. It brings back the Baptists' own wording of 1644, in which God foreordained some to life in Christ, "leaving the rest in their sin." Renihan calls this the language of preterition, "as opposed to reprobation which states that God positively ordained the rest of mankind to be condemned."[70] The omission of WCF 3.7, with its ordaining of the rest "to dishonour and wrath," belongs with it.

On the covenant of redemption, Renihan's judgment is direct. "One of the ways in which the Particular Baptists' confession stepped ahead of its parent documents was an explicit appeal to the covenant of redemption." That appeal "closely connected the historical application of salvation, the covenant of grace, to the decree of salvation, the covenant of redemption," and so "tightened the connections." The new paragraph 7.3, he notes, "was unique."[71] Westminster too places the covenant of grace after the Fall: "Man, by his Fall having made himself uncapable of Life by that Covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a Second."[72] What is new in 1677 is that the covenant made with fallen man is grounded in the eternal transaction between the Father and the Son, and contrasted with "those terms, on which Adam stood."

I draw an inference from the pattern, and I state it as an inference. A document written to show agreement could have left these points as Westminster left them. Instead its editors chose to state them more plainly: the rest are left in their sin, God has no fellowship with sin, the sinfulness lies in the creature's acts, Adam fell without compulsion, and the covenant of grace rests on an eternal covenant made for the posterity of fallen Adam. That fits the preface's promise of "candor and plainness." The Confession itself does not say that the covenant of redemption was made in view of the foreseen Fall. That order is stated by Coxe and Keach, as I showed in §3.3. But the Confession's changes are the wording such an order needs, and the treatise of Coxe, in all likelihood one of its chief editors, supplies the order.

6. 2LCF 6.1: "Without Any Compulsion"

6.1 The Text in Four Versions

The Baptists' Confession of 1644 said that Adam "did wittingly and willingly fall into disobedience and transgression of the Commandement of their great Creator, for the which death

[70] 1644 Confession, art. III, quoted in Renihan, "From Shadow to Substance," 85; see 85 n. 12.
[71] Renihan, "From Shadow to Substance," 147; 180 n. 41.
[72] WCF 7.3, pp. 15–16.

came upon all."[73] Westminster says that "Our first Parents being seduced by the subtilty and temptation of Satan, sinned, in eating the forbidden fruit. This their sin, God was pleased, according to his wise and holy counsell to permit, having purposed to order it to his own glory."[74] Savoy recasts the paragraph around the covenant of works: our first parents "did wilfully transgress the Law of their Creation, and break the Covenant in eating the forbidden fruit." It drops the sentence on permission.[75]

The 1677 text reads: "ALthough God created Man upright, and perfect, and gave him a righteous law, which had been unto life had he kept it, and threatned death upon the breach thereof; yet he did not long abide in this honour; Satan using the subtilty of the serpent to seduce Eve, then by her seducing Adam, who without any compulsion, did wilfully transgress the Law of their Creation, and the command given unto them, in eating the forbidden fruit; which God was pleased according to his wise and holy Councel to permit, having purposed to order it, to his own glory."[76] The editors took Savoy's "wilfully transgress the Law of their Creation." They put back the sentence on permission that Savoy had removed. And they added a denial of compulsion that neither parent had. In one sentence the creature's act and God's permission stand side by side, with nothing between them. Renihan rightly calls the chapter "not a shying away from the covenant of works, but a clearer confession of it."[77]

6.2 What the Phrase Denies

"Compulsion" means coaction, force upon the will. Coxe, Norton and Witsius all deny coaction while holding a necessity of infallibility. Coxe asks whether the agents were not "all … free from coaction, and therefore responsible."[78] Witsius speaks of liberty "as it is opposed to compulsion," and holds at the same time that the necessity of the Fall was "only a consequential and eventual infallibility and necessity."[79] So the phrase by itself does not prove that Adam had LUF, and I do not claim that it does. What it rules out is any reading on which the decree acted on Adam's will as a force. It shuts the door on the claim, which critics of Reformed Orthodoxy make and none of its defenders admit, that the decree made Adam sin.

6.3 What the Sentence as a Whole Implies

The phrase does more work when it is read with the paragraphs around it. In 4.2 our first parents were "under a possibility of transgressing, being left to the liberty of their own will, which was subject to change."[80] In 9.1 the will has "natural liberty, and power of acting upon choice," and is not determined "by any necessity of nature," the word "absolute" being dropped. In 9.2 Adam "was mutable, so that he might fall from it."[81] Read together, the 1677 wording places in Adam a power and a mutability that belong to him as a creature. The Fall is then said to be permitted, not effected. Adam's act is attributed to Adam alone, and God's relation to it is that of permission and ordering.

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[73] The 1644 Confession, art. IV, as quoted in Renihan, "From Shadow to Substance," 85.
[74] WCF 6.1, p. 14.
[75] Savoy 6.1, p. 6.
[76] 2LCF 6.1, pp. 23–24.
[77] Renihan, "From Shadow to Substance," 139; see 140.
[78] Coxe, *Vindiciae*, 93.
[79] Witsius, *Economy of the Covenants*, I.viii.26–27, 149–50.
[80] 2LCF 4.2, pp. 17–18.
[81] 2LCF 9.1–9.2, p. 35.

I argue that this combination implies more than spontaneity. A will that is "left to the liberty" of itself, with a "power of acting upon choice," and "mutable, so that he might fall," is a will that might have stood. Coxe's own account of Adam says as much: it was "in his own Power and Choice, either to obey … or to sin." Norton supplies the right word for the decree's part: "His Decree being only the Antecedent, not the cause."[82] This is the wording a doctrine of LUF needs. I present that as an inference from the text, not as the stated intent of the editors.

7. Part Four: Clearing God of the Authorship of Sin

7.1 Permissive Will within the Decree

The Confession says that by the decree "is God neither the author of sin, nor hath fellowship with any therin."[83] It says that God's providence reaches "even to the first fall, and all other sinful actions both of Angels, and Men; (and that not by a bare permission)," and yet that "the sinfulness of their acts proceedeth only from the Creatures, and not from God; who being most holy and righteous, neither is nor can be, the author or approver of sin."[84] And it says that God "was pleased according to his wise and holy Councel to permit" the Fall.[85] Coxe gives the rule in a sentence: "Those that are good God decreed to effect; those that are evil, to permit, or suffer to be done, knowing how, and having purposed in himself to order them, and over rule the doing of them for his own glory in the end."[86] God "purposed to create man upright, but mutable; and to permit his temptation and falling by sin; and to save a remnant of fallen man-kind, by Jesus Christ."[87] Keach draws the line in the same place: "all things come to pass by his All-wise Providence: According to his Eternal Decree; either by his special Commission, or by his Permission; to say all things come to pass by Gods special Commmission [sic], is to make him the author of Sin."[88] He also asks, "did not God both foreknow and permit the Fall of Man? Or, could he not have hindred it?"[89]

This is common Reformed ground. Norton writes that "God willeth the permission of sin, but he doth not will sin as sin."[90] Turretin holds that the providence of God is occupied about sin "neither idly to permit it … nor efficiently to produce it …, but efficaciously to order and direct it": "As to its beginning, he freely permits it; as to its progress, he wisely directs it; as to its end, he powerfully terminates" it.[91] Witsius says that God "foreordained the permission of that sin."[92] My point is not that the Reformed Orthodox lack the word. It is that permission clears God only if what is permitted has its origin in the creature. A permission of an act that God's prior determination has already made inevitable for the creature is a permission in name only. Everything depends on what stands before the permission in the order of God's purposes.

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[82] 2LCF 9.1, p. 35; Coxe, *Discourse*, 29–30; Norton, *Orthodox Evangelist*, 73. On the boundary 9.1 sets, see Smith, "Fall Has a Date," §3, 3–4.
[83] 2LCF 3.1, p. 13.
[84] 2LCF 5.4, pp. 20–21.
[85] 2LCF 6.1, pp. 23–24.
[86] Coxe, *Vindiciae*, 91.
[87] Coxe, *Vindiciae*, 91–92.
[88] Benjamin Keach, *God Acknowledged* (London: W. and J. Marshal, 1696), 7.
[89] Benjamin Keach, *The Marrow of True Justification* (London: Dorman Newman, 1692), 24.
[90] Norton, *Orthodox Evangelist*, 62.
[91] Turretin, *Institutes*, VI.vii.2, 4, 515–16.
[92] Witsius, *Economy of the Covenants*, I.viii.28, 150.

7.2 The Order: Knowledge of the Mutable Fall, Then the Covenant of Redemption, Then the Decree to Permit

This is the center of my argument. In the order of God's purposes, which is an order of reason and not of time, God knows what mutable Adam would freely do under the condition of God's own supposed will to create him, to uphold him, to concur with him and to permit him. In view of that knowledge the Father and the Son covenant to redeem a people from the fallen race. Then, by one decree, God wills to create, to uphold, to permit the Fall, and to carry out the covenant. The decree to permit therefore permits what God already knew Adam would do in his mutability. It does not produce it.

I build this on Coxe's and Keach's redemptive order, and I must say plainly where I go beyond them. Both men put the covenant of redemption in view of the foreseen Fall. God, "who from Eternity foresaw the Fall of Man, had also from Eternity a gracious Purpose" to redeem; without "a War foreseen" there could be "no occasion of a Covenant of Peace."[93] Keach adds that God "was at liberty (who foreseeing Man's Fall and horrible Transgression, he having forfeited all those Blessings bestowed originally upon him) whether he would or would not afford him any Help or Relief," and asks, "Was there any thing in Man that could be a Motive to move the Almighty to enter into this Covenant, to save so vile a Creature…?"[94] Collins speaks of God's counsels "upon making and redeeming the World" together.[95] The foreseen Fall is the occasion. God's love and mercy are the motive. Nothing in man moves him.

Coxe also says something else, and I will not hide it. In the *Vindiciae* he writes that "the foreknowledge of things to be that is in God, supposeth his Decree that they shall be."[96] And of the Fall: "if the most high decreed to permit it, and so from Eternity foreknew it as future, this infers a necessity of Infallibility, that in time it would so come to pass."[97] There the decree to permit comes first, and the foreknowledge follows from it. Norton holds the same: "the Futurition of the creature is nothing else but God willing the creature to be."[98] One sentence of Coxe's runs the other way. Arguing against Collier, who granted that God foreknew Adam's fall, Coxe asks, "Could the Almighty have prevented this or not? If he could and yet did not, we conclude, that he willed or decreed not to prevent it."[99] That sentence moves from foreknowledge to a decree not to prevent. But it is an argument from his opponent's own admission, and Coxe states the order the other way in the next lines. I do not rest anything on it.

So there are two orders in Coxe, and they pull against each other. In the *Discourse* the covenant of redemption looks to a Fall that God foresaw. In the *Vindiciae* God foreknows the Fall because he has decreed to permit it. If the second order is pressed, then the decree to permit stands before the covenant, and the covenant answers a Fall that the decree had already made future. The redemptive order of the *Discourse* would then rest on the decree and not on God's knowledge of what Adam in his mutability would do. My order carries the first through and corrects the second. Knowledge

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[93] Coxe, *Discourse*, 36–37; Keach, *Display of Glorious Grace*, 9–10.
[94] Benjamin Keach, *A Golden Mine Opened* (London: printed and sold by the author and William Marshall, 1694), 149.
[95] Collins, *Marrow of Gospel-History*, 16.
[96] Coxe, *Vindiciae*, 91.
[97] Coxe, *Vindiciae*, 92.
[98] Norton, *Orthodox Evangelist*, 54.
[99] Coxe, *Vindiciae*, 92.

comes before the decree. The covenant of redemption is eternal, but it stands in God's purpose after his knowledge of Adam's mutable fall, and the decree to permit follows the covenant. In that sense I build on Coxe, and I take his *Discourse* further than his *Vindiciae* would allow.

The step of placing this knowledge before the decree is not my invention. It comes from Reformed Orthodox divines of the minority. Alsted defined the knowledge by which God knows "if this should be, that will be future," and Crocius placed it within God's simple intelligence.[100] Alsted denied that God's will is "moved and ordered by the will of the creature," or "even by the object."[101] Gomarus said that God regarded the foreseen series of things "not as a cause but as an occasion."[102] Le Blanc explained that for a thing to be future only under a condition "there is not required a decree which is in God in act, but a decree suffices which, according to the hypothesis, would have to be posited in God."[103] And Walaeus wrote that "without this hypothetical knowledge preceding the decrees of God, the immutability of the divine decrees seems hardly able to be defended."[104] Paul Ferry, as Le Blanc quotes him, put the middle of the order in one sentence: "First God foresaw that man would fall, if he were created fallible and tempted. Next (because He saw that it was expedient that it be so), it pleased Him that this should come to pass, not by bringing force upon man, but by so creating man and permitting [him] to temptation and to himself."[105]

Set out in full, the order I propose is this. First is God's end: his glory in the Son, and a people given to the Son. Then comes his knowledge of all he could make, which includes what each free creature would freely do in each circumstance he might set, with his own will to create, uphold, concur and permit supposed in the condition. Then comes the judgment of his wisdom, which route would most fully serve those purposes. Because Adam would freely fall, wisdom judged that the fullest route was the one in which the Son undertakes to redeem a people from a fall, and that is the form the eternal covenant takes. Then comes the one decree, to create, to uphold, to permit, and to carry out that covenant by that route. Last comes God's knowledge of what will be, because he has decreed it.[106] I add the caution I gave when I first set it out: Scripture and the confessions do not settle the order of the decrees, and the placing of the covenant within that order is my own inference from the end the older writers give it.[107]

Augustine himself speaks in this way. God, he says, "foreknew that evil things would arise out of good, and knew that it pertained to His most omnipotent goodness even to do good out of evil

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[100] Johann Heinrich Alsted, *Theologia scholastica didactica* (Hanau: Conrad Eifrid, 1618), sect. I, cap. XXIV, praec. III, 97; Ludovicus Crocius, *Syntagma sacrae theologiae quatuor libris adornatum* (Bremen: Bertholdus Villerianus, 1636), III.15, aph. XVII, 575. Translations of the Latin authors in this paper are mine.

[101] Alsted, *Theologia scholastica didactica*, sect. I, cap. XXII, reg. IV, 86; cap. XXI, reg. X, 82.

[102] Franciscus Gomarus, *Disputationes theologicae*, disp. X, th. XXXV, in *Opera theologica omnia*, 2nd ed. (Amsterdam: Joannes Janssonius, 1664), pars II, 28.

[103] Louis Le Blanc de Beaulieu, "De concordia libertatis humanae cum decretis divinis," pars I, th. XLVIII, in *Theses theologicae, variis temporibus in Academia Sedanensi editae et ad disputandum propositae* (London: Moses Pitt, 1675), 453.

[104] Antonius Walaeus, *Loci communes*, "De Dei scientia," in *Opera omnia*, vol. 1 (Leiden: Franciscus Hackius, 1643), 175. See Smith, "Mutable," §8, 11–13.

[105] Paul Ferry, as quoted by Le Blanc de Beaulieu, *Theses theologicae*, "De concordia," pars I, th. XXXI, 450; my translation, as given in GKWD, §3.8, 105.

[106] GKWD, §3.8, 105–6.

[107] GKWD, §3.8, 105: "No writer I cite places the covenant before the decree to create; that placement is my own inference from the end they give it. Scripture and the confessions do not settle the order of the decrees, and my argument does not depend on it."

things rather than not to allow evil things to be at all." And of Adam: God "foreknew what he would do in unrighteousness; foreknew, however, but did not compel him to this; but at the same time He knew what He Himself would do in righteousness concerning him."[108] The knowledge of what Adam would do and the knowledge of what God would do in righteousness concerning him stand together, and neither compels.

My order must also be distinguished from Turretin's infralapsarianism. Turretin holds that the object of predestination is man "as created and fallen," and he grants that "the creation of man and the permission of the fall come under the decree of God."[109] With that I agree. But as I read his scheme, the permission of the Fall is decreed first, and the Fall is known as future because it is decreed. In mine the Fall is known first, as what mutable Adam would do, and the permission is decreed in view of it.

7.3 The Confession's 3.2: Ground, Not Occasion

The Second London Confession keeps the Westminster wording of 3.2: "Although God knoweth whatsoever may, or can come to passe upon all supposed conditions; yet hath he not Decreed any thing, because he foresaw it as future, or as that which would come to pass upon such conditions."[110] I meet the clause openly. I read it as denying that God's foreknowledge is the ground of the decree. It does not deny that this knowledge is the occasion in view of which the decree is formed. The argument is drawn from the Confession itself.

Begin with the clause's own wording. "Because" is causal. The Confession uses the same vocabulary two paragraphs later, where election is "out of his meer free grace and love; without any other thing in the creature as a condition or cause moving him thereunto."[111] What is excluded is a moving cause or condition. God's knowledge is not excluded; the first half of 3.2 affirms it.

Next, the kept clause must be read in its context, and its context is the set of deliberate changes the editors made at the points nearest to it. In 3.3 the rest of mankind are "left to act in their sin to their just condemnation." The Westminster paragraph that ordained the rest "to dishonour and wrath" is gone. In 3.1 God has no "fellowship" with sin. In 5.4 the permission is not bare, and the sinfulness is that of "their acts." In 6.1 Adam sins "without any compulsion," and God "was pleased … to permit" it. In 7.2 God makes the covenant of grace when "Man having brought himself under the curse of the Law by his fall." In 7.3 that covenant is founded in the eternal transaction between the Father and the Son, made for "the posterity of fallen Adam," who are set against "those terms, on which Adam stood."

Now suppose that 3.2 denied occasion as well as ground. Then nothing of Adam's fall could be in view in the eternal counsel except as something the decree itself had first made future. On that reading the permission of 6.1 would be a permission of what the decree had already made certain for the creature. The "leaving" of 3.3 would fall back into the positive ordaining of the paragraph the editors deleted. And the fallen posterity of 7.3 would be the product of the decree rather than the object of the covenant. The changes would then be pointless, or would contradict one another. Read

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[108] Augustine, *On Rebuke and Grace* 27, 37, trans. Peter Holmes and Robert Ernest Wallis, rev. Benjamin B. Warfield, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, first series, vol. 5, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing, 1887), rev. and ed. for New Advent by Kevin Knight, https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1513.htm.

[109] Turretin, *Institutes*, IV.ix, 341; IV.ix.6, 342.

[110] 2LCF 3.2, pp. 13–14; compare WCF 3.2, p. 9.

[111] 2LCF 3.5, pp. 14–15.

as a denial of ground only, the kept clause and the changes agree. The editors told us they had expressed their differences "with all candor and plainness." The reading that lets their changes mean something is to be preferred to the reading that empties them.

There is an opposing view, and I record it. William Twisse, prolocutor of the Westminster Assembly, wrote a treatise against Molina's middle knowledge.[112] From that it is a reasonable inference that he and others read the clause more strictly, as excluding any knowledge of conditioned futures prior to the decree. I answer that reading from the Second London Confession's own changes, as above. Whatever the Westminster divines meant, the Baptist editors kept the clause inside a document that, on the strict reading, would contradict itself.

7.4 Eternal, Not in Time

When I say that the covenant of redemption "came after" the Fall, I mean that it came after God's knowledge of the Fall, in God's mind and not in history. Before time began, the Fall had not occurred. Keach is careful here: the covenant's "Rise, and Constitution, was from Eternity, tho' the Revelation, and Publication, was in Time."[113] Norton writes, "God is one Act in whom there is no succession," and he marks what holds only "in order of our conception."[114] Turretin calls the decree "posterior in the sign of reason … and on the part of our conception (not by reason of the thing and time)."[115] Coxe himself says that things "are therefore thus effected in time, because God had decreed this order before time."[116] I therefore never speak of God as responding to the Fall in time, or acting upon it after it happened. God's knowledge, his covenant and his decree are one eternal purpose, ordered in reason and not in time.

7.5 The First Asymmetry: God Eternal, the Creature Temporal

God's order and the creature's order are ranked, and modal status does not pass from the higher to the lower. The decree makes the Fall infallibly certain in God's order, with the necessity of the consequence only. In Adam's order the act remains one he could have left undone. That is how I read the passage Coxe borrows from Norton: "Adam might not have sinned; is a Categorick, or simple proposition, and is true of Adam in the sense of division, considered as in himself. It could not be but that Adam would sin, is a modal, or qualified proposition; and is true of Adam in a sense of composition, being considered as subordinate to the Decree."[117] Here Coxe gives me exactly what I need. The "could not be but" holds once the decree is in view, and only then. Considered in himself, Adam might not have sinned. Coxe also warns against "confounding the Decree of God with the execution thereof."[118]

Turretin says the same in his own way. The certainty of the event "does not arise from the nature of second causes, which are free and contingent, but extrinsically from the immutability of the decree

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[112] William Twisse, *Dissertatio de scientia media tribus libris absoluta* (Arnhem, 1639), as listed by Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 2, *God and Creation*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 199 n. 91; on Twisse as prolocutor, see Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons; New York: Charles Scribner, 1872), 317. See GKWD, §9.1.4, 277–78.

[113] Keach, *Everlasting Covenant*, preface; see 11.

[114] Norton, *Orthodox Evangelist*, 60, 56.

[115] Turretin, *Institutes*, IV.i.14, 313: "posterior in the sign of reason (in signo rationis)."

[116] Coxe, *Vindiciae*, 91.

[117] Coxe, *Vindiciae*, 93, transcribing Norton, *Orthodox Evangelist*, 75.

[118] Coxe, *Vindiciae*, 16; see 15, "the futurition of all these, was from Everlasting determined in Gods Decree."

(which so determines the futurition of the event as not to change the nature of things, but permits necessary things to act necessarily, free things freely).” So “we may rightly say, ‘Adam sinned necessarily and freely’: the former with respect to the decree and the futurition of the thing; the latter with respect to his will and as to the mode.”[119] He grants that Adam’s power “could be determined to evil no less than to good (but successively and in the divided sense, not at the same time and in the compound sense).”[120]

I take these men at their word, and I argue that their distinction does real work only if the decree to permit follows God’s knowledge of what Adam would do. If the decree first determines Adam’s will, and the certainty of the Fall flows from that determination, then the certainty is not extrinsic to Adam at all. It is lodged in him by a prior act of God, and “might not have sinned” names a power that the decree had already settled against. If instead the decree permits what God knew mutable Adam would do, then the certainty is truly extrinsic. It is the certainty of God’s knowledge and of his immutable purpose, and it leaves Adam’s power in his own order as it was.[121]

7.6 The Second Asymmetry: Innocent Adam, Fallen Posterity

Adam had LUF toward good and evil, with regulative and guidance control. His posterity are “now conceived in Sin, and by nature children of wrath, the servants of Sin, the subjects of death and all other miseries, spiritual, temporal and eternal, unless the Lord Jesus set them free.”[122] Fallen man “hath wholly lost all ability of Will, to any spiritual good accompanying salvation; so as a natural man, being altogether averse from that good, and dead in Sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself; or to prepare himself thereunto.”[123] Coxe says the same of fallen Adam: “neither Power, nor Will,” “utterly disabled.”[124] Collins, in verse, calls man “undone by the abuse of his Free-Will.”[125] “By the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners.”[126]

The mode of freedom stays the same: uncoerced, and not premoved. Its range changes with the state.[127] We should remember that the 1677 Confession was prepared while a Baptist, Thomas Collier, was teaching that fallen man could believe the gospel “of his own power.”[128] The second asymmetry therefore cuts both ways. It gives real power to Adam, and it denies that power to his fallen race toward the spiritual good. Reformed Baptist covenant theology keeps this as an epoch: a covenant of creation with a man who could keep it, a broken covenant, and a covenant of grace for a race that cannot. The flat modal account turns it into a difference of desires under one unchanging necessity.

7.7 Why This Clears God

If Adam’s act is the originating cause of the Fall, and God’s part is to know it, to permit it within his decree, and to order it to his glory, then sin is a defect in the creature’s will with no efficient cause

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[119] Turretin, *Institutes*, IV.iv.6, 8, 321.
[120] Turretin, *Institutes*, VIII.i.8, 570–71.
[121] GKWD, §9.2, 281; app. A, 297.
[122] 2LCF 6.3, pp. 24–25.
[123] 2LCF 9.3, pp. 35–36.
[124] Coxe, *Discourse*, 35–36.
[125] Collins, *Marrow of Gospel-History*, 10–11.
[126] Rom. 5:19 (ESV).
[127] GKWD, §1.3, 17; ch. 8, 242; Smith, “Fall Has a Date,” §6, 6–7.
[128] Renihan, “From Shadow to Substance,” 134.

in God. Sin has a deficient cause, not an efficient one, and that deficiency is the creature's.[129] God remains the God of whom Scripture says, "his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he."[130] He "cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one."[131] Coxe's verdict follows: "the sin and plagues of the world, lye at the door of rebellious man."[132] Collins puts it plainly: "O, blame not God, Free-will abus'd."[133]

The flat account cannot say this, and I think its best older writers felt it. Witsius writes that "Adam, God himself moving him to understand, will, and eat, could not but understand, will and eat"; on the same page he writes that "God bestowed sufficient powers on man … by which he could have overcome the temptation."[134] Both cannot be true in the same sense, and he saves them by the distinction of senses. But if the decree's determination is what makes the alternative absent for Adam, then the decree is the reason Adam fell. That is the charge the defenders of the flat account reject. They are right to reject it, but on their own terms they cannot answer it.[135] Norton's warning shows that they sense the danger: "we ought not to think, or say thus, God created man that he might permit him to sin, and permitted him to sin that he might punish him for sin, Ezek. 33.11. But God created man, permitted him to sin, and condemneth him for sin, to manifest the Glory of his Justice."[136] Norton forbids the sentence. My order explains why it is false. God did not create man in order that he would fall. He created a man he knew would fall, and he purposed in the same eternal counsel to redeem a people from that fall in his Son.

8. Augustine's Four States: Kept or Emptied

8.1 The Four States Rightly Stated

Augustine set the first liberty of man against the last. "The first man was able not to sin, was able not to die, was able not to forsake good." And so "the first liberty of the will was to be able not to sin, the last will be much greater, not to be able to sin."[137] The Reformed scholastics drew from this the fourfold scheme I gave in §2: Adam able not to sin, fallen man not able not to sin, the regenerate able to sin and not to sin, the glorified not able to sin.[138] The confessions state the scheme in their ninth chapter, in substance alike. Man in innocency had freedom and power to do good, "but yet was mutable, so that he might fall from it." By the Fall he "hath wholly lost all ability of Will, to any spiritual good." When God converts a sinner he "enables him freely to will, and to do that which is spiritually good; yet so as that by reason of his remaining corruptions he doth not perfectly nor only will that which is good; but doth also will that which is evil." And "The Will of Man is

[129] GKWD, §7.2, 216; §7.6, 236; on deficient cause, 221–22.
[130] Deut. 32:4 (ESV).
[131] James 1:13 (ESV).
[132] Coxe, *Vindiciae*, 92.
[133] Collins, *Marrow of Gospel-History*, 11.
[134] Witsius, *Economy of the Covenants*, I.viii.25–26, 149.
[135] See Smith, "Mutable," §7, 9–11.
[136] Norton, *Orthodox Evangelist*, 56–57.
[137] Augustine, *On Rebuke and Grace* 33.
[138] Turretin, *Institutes*, VIII.i.6–9, 570–71.

made perfectly, and immutably free to good alone, in the state of Glory only."[139] Coxe uses the Adamic term in its proper place: Adam had the ability not to sin, not the inability to sin.[140]

8.2 Claimed, Not Kept

The Reformed Orthodox claim to be Augustine's heirs. Every reader of their tradition knows the claim, and their confessions and theologians repeat his four states; Turretin states them under Augustine's name.[141] I do not dispute that they make the claim. I deny that they have made it good. An inheritance is proved by keeping it, and the question is whether the account of freedom their modern exponents give lets the four states do any work.

Helm, Bignon and Preciado do not follow the distinctions. Helm sets aside, by the terms of his inquiry, the states the scheme distinguishes. He is "concerned with a feature of human nature as such, not with soteriology," and not "with the nature of such agency when fallen, or as enjoying the Spirit's work of regeneration." His aim is "to show that the view of Jonathan Edwards on the freedom of the human will known as compatibilism, was held by representative RO theologians in the seventeenth century, and is consistent with the Westminster Confession of Faith."[142] A freedom defined for human nature as such, apart from fall and regeneration, is one freedom for every state. Bignon defends Calvinist determinism, the view that "everything that comes to pass is determined, or necessitated by prior conditions," and he answers "no" for Satan, for Adam and Eve, for the unregenerate and for Christians alike.[143] Preciado gives one rule for "an agent" as such: no ability "to do otherwise than what God has decreed."[144] He also bounds the Reformed tradition by the "six forms of unity," the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of Dort and the three Westminster documents, and adds with R. Michael Allen that "Historically, Reformed theology is best identified by looking to confessions of the Reformed churches."[145] The Baptists' confession is not among them. Neither Bignon nor Preciado appeals to Augustine's states in the works cited here. I count them with Helm because they call themselves Reformed, because they agree with him that compatibilism is the Reformed view, and because both books came out under his foreword.

8.3 Denied in Practice

As I read the flat account, Adam's ability not to sin is real only in the divided sense, with the decree set aside. In every state the decree's determination is the reason the creature does what it does. The state of innocence and the state of sin then differ in the creature's desires, not in the relation of his will to the decree. Augustine's contrast between the first liberty and the slavery of sin is affirmed in words by the confessions these writers stand under, and on my reading it has no work to do in their explanation. The four states become four sets of desires under one necessity.[146]

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[139] 2LCF 9.2–9.5, pp. 35–36; compare WCF 9.2–9.5, p. 20.

[140] Coxe, *Discourse*, 29–30.

[141] Turretin, *Institutes*, VIII.i.9, 571, citing Augustine's treatise.

[142] Helm, *Reforming Free Will*, 30–31.

[143] Guillaume Bignon, *Excusing Sinners and Blaming God: A Calvinist Assessment of Determinism, Moral Responsibility, and Divine Involvement in Evil*, foreword by Paul Helm (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2018), 4–5, quoted in Kevin Timpe, review of *Excusing Sinners and Blaming God*, by Guillaume Bignon, *Faith and Philosophy* 35, no. 3 (2018): 373; Bignon, "Critical Review," 42.

[144] Preciado, *Reformed View of Freedom*, Introduction, quoted in GKWD, §2.1, 43–44; see Smith, "Fall Has a Date," §2, 1–3.

[145] Preciado, *Reformed View of Freedom*, 63, quoting R. Scott Clark and R. Michael Allen.

[146] Smith, "Mutable," §4, 5–6; §5, 6–7; Smith, "Fall Has a Date," §6, 6–7.

Put plainly, the position looks as though God created man so that he would fall. That is the sentence Norton forbade, and the flat account cannot keep from saying it in substance. I go further, and I state it as my own judgment, argued from the rules these authors state and not attributed to them as a doctrine they hold. If God's decree and knowledge work as the Reformed Orthodox, in the mouths of Bignon and Helm, say they work, then God's creation and his activity in it are little more than theater. The trial in Eden is a scene whose outcome was fixed by the same hand that wrote the warning. The command, the threat, the promise of reward and the call "Where are you?" are lines in a play.[147] That would deny the genuine personality of God, or at best distort it. A real person does not stage things so as to toy with creatures in a way that serves only to make himself look good.

This is why the thesis calls God personal. The God of Scripture speaks and is answered, warns and is disobeyed, grieves and judges and shows mercy. "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness."[148] "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live."[149] These are the words of a person dealing with persons. On my account they are true as spoken, because Adam's choice was his own and God's dealings with him answered to what Adam was. On the flat account they are true only as parts of a performance whose every line was fixed in advance by the determination of the one who speaks them. Such a God is not cleared of tyranny by the word "permission." He is made to look like a tyrant, and not the good, personal and just God the Bible reveals.

8.4 Why the Reformed Baptists Keep Them

The Reformed Baptist covenant scheme maps the four states onto the covenants. The covenant of creation goes with Adam's ability not to sin, and with LUF over good and evil. The broken covenant and the fallen posterity go with the inability not to sin. The covenant of grace, revealed by farther steps, goes with the regenerate state, able to sin and able not to sin. The consummation of that covenant goes with glory, where the will is "perfectly, and immutably free to good alone." Because 7.3 contrasts the fallen race with "those terms, on which Adam stood in his state of innocency," the distinction between the states is built into the structure of the covenants and not only stated in a chapter on the will.[150] Each state has its own covenantal standing, and each standing changes the range of the will. On this ground I hold that the Reformed Baptists are the consistent heirs of Augustine on this point. They do not merely name his states; their covenant theology needs them.

9. The Strongest Objection: Does a Permissive Decree Leave the Fall Uncertain?

9.1 The Objection in Its Best Form

If God only permits the Fall, and the Fall comes from Adam's own power, then the Fall seems to depend on the creature. In that case God's knowledge of it is either uncertain or learned from the creature, and the decree depends on something outside God. The tradition states the objection in its

[147] Gen. 3:9 (ESV).
[148] Exod. 34:6 (ESV).
[149] Ezek. 33:11 (ESV). Norton cites the same verse in the warning quoted in §7.7.
[150] 2LCF 7.3, p. 27; 9.2–9.5, pp. 35–36; Coxe, *Discourse*, 29–30, 43; GKWD, ch. 8, 242.

own words. “The Futurition of the creature is nothing else but God willing the creature to be.” “Were not the Object of Divine Knowledge in God, there could be no certaine knowledge of future contingents.”[151] “The foreknowledge of things to be that is in God, supposeth his Decree that they shall be.”[152] And Turretin rejects the “figment of bare and idle permission.”[153] The objector adds the Confession’s 3.2: God has not decreed anything “because he foresaw it.”

9.2 First Answer: Permission Is a Decree

My permission is not bare. It is a positive decree not to hinder, with a purpose to order. Coxe himself says that a decree “to permit it” carries “a necessity of Infallibility, that in time it would so come to pass; but leaves man as a free agent to the liberty of his own will, without any coaction thereto.”[154] The Confession says that God’s providence over the Fall is “not by a bare permission,” and Turretin says that permission “involves a positive act of the secret will.”[155] So the certainty of the Fall rests on God’s decree, as the objector requires.

9.3 Second Answer: The Decree Secures, the Creature Causes

Certainty and causation are different things. The decree secures the event with the necessity of the consequence. Adam’s will causes it. Turretin grants the point when he says that the decree “so determines the futurition of the event as not to change the nature of things, but permits necessary things to act necessarily, free things freely.”[156] Coxe grants it when he says that free agents’ acts “necessarily come to pass” with the necessity of the consequence only.[157] Norton grants it in his best sentence: “Man acts as freely, as if there were no decree; yet as infallibly, as if there were no liberty.”[158] Because the certainty is extrinsic to Adam, it takes nothing from his power to have done otherwise in his own order.

9.4 Third Answer: Knowledge within the Decree

God’s knowledge of what Adam would do is not learned from the creature. It lies within God’s simple intelligence. It is grounded first in God’s own understanding and supposed will, and only within that in the creature God conceives. The decree is formed in view of that knowledge, and so it cannot fail. Walaeus saw that this knowledge protects the immutability of the decree rather than threatening it, and Le Blanc explained how a conditioned future depends on a decree supposed rather than a decree in act.[159] What the decree contains depends, in the order of reason, on what Adam would freely do. Had he been one who would refrain, the decree would have been other.[160] That is not dependence on something outside God. It is God’s own knowledge of the creature he himself conceives, under his own supposed will.

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[151] Norton, *Orthodox Evangelist*, 54, 55.
[152] Coxe, *Vindiciae*, 91.
[153] Turretin, *Institutes*, VI.viii.10, 532; see VI.vii.7, 516–17.
[154] Coxe, *Vindiciae*, 92.
[155] 2LCF 5.4, pp. 20–21; Turretin, *Institutes*, VI.vii.7, 516–17.
[156] Turretin, *Institutes*, IV.iv.6, 321.
[157] Coxe, *Vindiciae*, 91.
[158] Norton, *Orthodox Evangelist*, 76.
[159] Walaeus, *Loci communes*, *Opera omnia*, 1:175; Le Blanc de Beaulieu, *Theses theologicae*, “De concordia,” pars I, th. XLVIII, 453; Alsted, *Theologia scholastica didactica*, sect. I, cap. XXIV, praec. III, 97.
[160] GKWD, §3.7, 94; §4.3a, 136; §9.2, 281.

9.5 What the Objection Does and Does Not Prove

The objection proves that the Fall is certain from eternity, and I agree. It does not prove that the certainty must come from a determination of Adam's will, and that is the only thing I deny. The conditioned knowledge reaches Adam's act alone. It is never applied to grace or to the choice of persons, so election remains by God's good pleasure, "without any other thing in the creature as a condition or cause moving him thereunto," as the Confession requires.[161] Gomarus, Crocius and Alsted, who held such a knowledge, took part in the Synod of Dort, and none of them was charged with breaking its canons.[162]

This answer also meets the objector's appeal to 3.2. The clause denies that what God foresaw is the reason he decreed. I agree. The knowledge is the occasion in view of which the decree is formed, never its cause or its motive. God's motive is in himself: "There can be no Motive of Gods Will, besides himself," as Norton says, and in the covenant of peace "the grand Motive" is God's "Love and Mercy," as Keach says.[163] The stricter reading, that 3.2 forbids even the occasion, cannot be squared with the Confession's own changes, as I showed in §7.3: the leaving of 3.3, the deletion of the Westminster paragraph on ordaining the rest to wrath, the permission and the "without any compulsion" of 6.1, and the covenant of 7.2–7.3 made for "the posterity of fallen Adam." Twisse's stricter reading remains the opposing view.

The answer also returns us to the personal God. On the objector's account God's certainty is secured only if God first determines the creature, and so every warning God gives to an unfallen creature is spoken to one already settled against it. On mine God's certainty is secured by his knowledge and his decree together, and his warning to Adam was spoken to a man who could have heeded it. God loses nothing of his control of all things. He gains back what the flat account had taken from him in the reader's eyes: the character of one who means what he says. That is no theater. "The counsel of his will" governs all things, and the God whose counsel it is does not toy with his creatures.[164]

10. Conclusion

I have argued four things. First, the Reformed Baptist covenant scheme marks Adam's trial and his race's fall as distinct epochs: a covenant of creation with a mutable man who could have kept it, and a covenant of grace for a fallen race that cannot, revealed by farther steps and founded in an eternal covenant between the Father and the Son. Second, the Second London Confession, written to show agreement, deliberately sharpened its wording on the decree, on permission, on the Fall and on the covenant of redemption. Its editors said that where they differed they had spoken with candor and plainness, and their changes bear them out. Third, those changes, carried through, ground the clearing of God from the authorship of sin. They do so by placing the covenant of redemption after God's knowledge of Adam's mutable fall, with the decree to permit following, all in eternity and not in time, under the two asymmetries of God and creature and of Adam and his posterity. In this I have built on Coxe and Keach and gone beyond them, and I have said where. Fourth, Augustine's

[161] 2LCF 3.5, pp. 14–15.
[162] GKWD, §9.1.4, 277, and the sources given there.
[163] Norton, *Orthodox Evangelist*, 58; Keach, *Display of Glorious Grace*, 8.
[164] Eph. 1:11 (ESV): "who works all things according to the counsel of his will."

four states are kept on the Reformed Baptist account in fact and not only in name, because the covenants require them.

I return, then, to the thesis with which I began. Only the Reformed Baptist position presents God as he is revealed in Scripture, as good, personal, gracious and merciful, just and wise, without being a tyrant, while also giving him control of all things including saving humanity in an act of pure simultaneous justice and grace, and according to an eternal covenant of redemption.

Each part of the argument has borne this out. God's goodness and justice appear in Adam's real trial, under a covenant God freely made with a man who had power to keep it, and who fell "without any compulsion" (§§3, 6). God's wisdom and grace appear in the eternal covenant of redemption, in which the Father and the Son, knowing the Fall, purposed from eternity to redeem a people from it (§§3.3, 7.2). His justice and his grace meet in that redemption, so that he is "just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus."[165] His control of all things stands through the one decree, which permits, orders and carries out all that comes to pass, and from which nothing escapes (§§7, 9). And he is free of any charge of tyranny or of authoring sin, because the sin he permitted had its origin in the creature, and because his words to his creatures are the words of a person and not the lines of a play (§§7.7, 8.3).

I wrote this for my grandson, and for anyone else who needs to see the distance I spoke of at the beginning. It is not a small distance. It reaches to how we speak of God himself. The critiques of Bignon and Preciado that I am passing on in other documents, "Mutable, So That He Might Fall" and "The Fall Has a Date," build on the foundation laid here. I agree with both men on much. Where I part from them, it is because I believe the Reformed Baptist covenant theology lets God be what Scripture says he is.

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