

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Background of the Research

1.1.1 Overview of Reformed Covenant Theology and Its Importance

'Humanity as the bearer of the divine image was created for fellowship with God.'¹ Nevertheless, since God is transcendent, this kind of fellowship with humanity is only possible in the form of a covenant in Christ,² where God sovereignly chooses to bind Himself with us and deal with us immanently.³ According to Fesko, Adam was in the covenant with God once being created, and in this covenantal relationship, there is a creation-creature distinction between God and man, yet at the same time a natural bond between man and God, since 'God endowed Adam with His divine image'.⁴ He adds that, in this covenantal relationship, we are created *in covenant* and *for covenant*, and that is why while we are bound to God naturally, we still have to receive the covenant in a formal way.⁵ God speaks and desires to have His words written down as the constitution for His covenant people, not only on stone but also in our hearts through Christ.⁶ Therefore, it is not to be surprised that the themes and motifs of covenant are

¹ Guy Prentiss Waters, J. Nicholas Reid, and John R. Muether, 'Introduction,' in *Covenant Theology: Biblical, Theological, and Historical Perspectives*, ed. Guy Prentiss Waters, J. Nicholas Reid, and John R. Muether (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 31.

² Ibid. Some use 'mediator of Christ' for the pre-fall epoch. i.e.: E. J. Schnabel, "Wisdom," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner, electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 846. Some theologians object to the use of the term 'mediator' for creation, i.e.: Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, Second Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 651. This might be related to the definition of 'mediator' where according to Mounce, a mediator is not only the middleman between God and man but also the one who 'mediates a disagreement between two parties in order to reach a common understanding': William D. Mounce, in *Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old & New Testament Words* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 445. Despite the disagreement on the 'mediation of Christ' in creation, the major consensus is that there is nothing apart from Christ.

³ O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1980), 4. defines Covenant as 'bond in blood sovereignly administrated'. For the transcendence and the immanence of God with regard to covenant see John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013), 50.

⁴ J. V. Fesko, *Adam and the Covenant of Works* (Great Britain: Mentor, 2021), 322-323

⁵ Ibid., 325-326

⁶ John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God, A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2010), 37, 212, 325

prevalent throughout the Bible. In fact, 'covenant' is believed to be the 'heart' and the 'framework' of all biblical revelation, even seen as the most extensive unifying motif in the Bible.⁷ Not only does the motifs of covenant permeate across different epochs in the Bible, serve as a framework showing the one story of the history of redemption; it also systematically integrates many essential doctrines, thus, it is regarded as a 'blending of both biblical and systematic theology.'⁸

Although it is prevalent in the Bible, covenant theology only developed in the post-Reformation period,⁹ yet it is not a sudden development but upon the foundations made by many theologians,¹⁰ with its roots back to the early Roman Catholic period.¹¹ While theologians up to 17th-century had different views on the details of covenant theology, Reformed covenant theology came into crystallization in Westminster Standard with the common agreements among the divines of the Westminster Assembly on the key elements.¹² The confession about covenant was mentioned explicitly in Westminster Confession of Faith, WCF VII. It teaches us that God is our Creator, and we owe utmost obedience to Him. Still, because of His transcendence, we can never have the blessing from Him unless He voluntarily condescends to us through

Vos had a similar thought as he said, 'Because God desires to be *known* after this fashion, He has caused His revelation to take place in the milieu of the historical life of a people. The circle of revelation is not a school, but a 'covenant'.' Taken from Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2003), 8.

⁷ Daniel I. Block, *Covenant: The Framework of God's Grand Plan of Redemption* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic: A Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2021), 1.

⁸ Ligon Duncan, 'Foreword,' in *Covenant Theology: Biblical, Theological, and Historical Perspectives*, ed. Guy Prentiss Waters, J. Nicholas Reid, and John R. Muether (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 24.

⁹ A. T. B. McGowan, *Adam, Christ and Covenant: Exploring Headship Theology* (London: Apollos, imprint of Inter-Varsity Press, 2016), 19.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Ligon Duncan, 'Foreword,' in *Covenant Theology: Biblical, Theological, and Historical Perspectives*, ed. Guy Prentiss Waters, J. Nicholas Reid, and John R. Muether (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 24.

See also:

J. V. Fesko, *The Covenant of Works: Origins, Development, and Reception of the Doctrine* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2020), 6. Fesko claims that 'the idea of an Adamic covenant in particular—has roots in patristic theology as well as Roman Catholic theologians of the period' and did extensive historical surveys & analysis in this book.

¹² J. V. Fesko, *The Covenant of Works: Origins, Development, and Reception of the Doctrine* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2020), 95.

covenant. The first covenant made with Adam as the representative of man was the covenant of works where life is promised to him and all humanity upon perfect and personal obedience. Ever since the fall of Adam, we all are not capable of having the life promised, the Lord made the second covenant, known as the covenant of grace, differently administered in the time of law and the time of the gospel, where all of the administrations in OT time fore-signifying the coming Christ. The covenant of grace is also known as a Testament in reference to the death of Jesus Christ, the testator; in Him, we can have all inheritance.

A contemporary Reformed theologian, McGowan, consider covenant theology as the heart of the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF), in which WCF 'teaches that the whole Bible revolves around a covenant of works (first covenant) made with humanity in Adam and a (second covenant) made with the elect in Christ.'¹³ Even though only one short chapter is used for the topic of covenant in WCF, the theme of covenant is present in other part of the confession, just like how it is in the Scripture. For example, in chapter 14 (Of Saving Faith) section II, it was written that the 'the principal acts of saving faith are... by the virtue of the covenant of grace.'

In Reformed systematic theology, there are two covenants, covenant of works and covenants of grace. We could see plenty of covenants under the covenant of grace (Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Christ), biblically in an explicit way.¹⁴ The covenant of works, though it is not as explicit as the covenant of grace in the Bible, it can be

¹³ A. T. B. McGowan, *Adam, Christ and Covenant: Exploring Headship Theology* (London: Apollos, imprint of Inter-Varsity Press, 2016), 13.

¹⁴ O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1980), 91–299 categorizes the biblical covenants under the covenant of grace (he uses the term covenant of redemption) which aligns with the statement of WCF in Chapter VII, V, 'covenant [of grace] was differently administered in the time of the law, and in the time of the gospel'. Although the term *covenant* is not present in Gen. 1-3, Robertson believes the covenant works (he refers it as the covenant of life) was made to Adam before the fall, and the covenant of grace (he refers it as the covenant of redemption) is commenced to Adam in Gen. 3 *protoevangelion*.

traced exegetically and systematically.¹⁵ Although the covenant of grace is administrated differently (Noah, Abraham, Moses, David) in the OT epoch, it is important to note that they are, as WCF VII.V-VI puts it, 'fore-signifying Christ' and 'Christ is the substance'. All covenants are pointing to Christ, as He is the one who fulfills all terms. A proper understanding of covenant theology will help us better understand Christ and His works.

1.1.2 The Critics against the Covenant of Works

This confessional statement 'became the standard theological position held by Reformed theologians throughout the world',¹⁶ and the highest reception was in the 17th century.¹⁷ However, the rejection of the covenant of works has been surging even within the Reformed circle from the nineteenth century onward.¹⁸

The opponents assert that the term 'covenant' does not occur in Genesis 1-3.¹⁹ Moreover, the great Scottish theologian of the twentieth century who assisted in founding the Westminster Theological Seminary and 'one of the best-known conservative Reformed critics of the covenant of works'²⁰, John Murray, noticed that 'covenant in the Scripture denotes oath-bound confirmation of promise'²¹ and this was absent in the covenant of works. According to Murray, whenever the Bible used the term 'covenant', it is related to redemption, and this was not the case with Adam since he was in the pre-fall state.²² Anthony Hoekema also mentioned that there is no indication of 'a covenant oath or a covenant ratification ceremony' in the Adamic

¹⁵ J. V. Fesko, *Adam and the Covenant of Works* (Great Britain: Mentor, 2021)

¹⁶ A. T. B. McGowan, in *Adam, Christ and Covenant: Exploring Headship Theology* (London: Apollos, imprint of Inter-Varsity Press, 2016), 13.

¹⁷ J. V. Fesko, *The Covenant of Works: Origins, Development, and Reception of the Doctrine* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2020), 137.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 155-187.

¹⁹ J. V. Fesko, *Adam and the Covenant of Works* (Great Britain: Mentor, 2021), 183.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, xix

²¹ John Murray, *Collected Writings, vol.2*, 49.

²² *Ibid.*

covenant; on the contrary, it is built solely on one verse, i.e., Hosea 6:7,²³ which can be interpreted in other ways and 'does not provide the basis for such a construction of the Adamic economy.'²⁴

1.1.3 *The Issue of Law-grace Dichotomy in the Covenant of Works*

The law-grace dichotomy is likely the main critic among those who oppose the doctrine of the covenant of work.²⁵ It is understandable why covenant of works is seen as 'law over grace' even though grace in the covenant of works is asserted by some theologians like Thomas Boston, as what Hoekema argues,

Calling this arrangement, a covenant of works does not do justice to the elements of grace that entered into this 'Adamic administration.' For, though it is true that Adam and Eve were to receive the blessing of continued life in fellowship with God along the path of 'works' (that is, by perfect obedience to God's commands), it by no means follows that they would by such obedience earn or merit this continued fellowship, understood by many to include everlasting life. God was indeed entitled to perfect obedience from his human creatures; he was not obligated, however, to give them a reward for such obedience. That he promised (by implication) to give man such a reward must be understood as a gift of God's grace.²⁶

As the covenant theology develops, two schools are formed even within the Reformed tradition (with one emphasizing law and the other on grace), and some start to break away from the covenant of works.²⁷ Scholars who break away from the covenant of works tend to emphasize grace over law in the covenant.²⁸ To solve the tension of the law-grace dichotomy, Murray believed the definition of covenant needs to be redefined as 'a sovereign promissory dispensation of grace related to

²³ Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 120.

'It would not seem wise, therefore, to base a doctrine on a single passage of this sort, the translation and meaning of which is not altogether certain.'

²⁴ A. T. B. McGowan, *Adam, Christ and Covenant: Exploring Headship Theology* (London: Apollos, imprint of Inter-Varsity Press, 2016), 62 quotes Murray, *Collected Writings*, vol. 2, 49

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

²⁶ Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 119.

²⁷ A. T. B. McGowan, *Adam, Christ and Covenant: Exploring Headship Theology* (London: Apollos, imprint of Inter-Varsity Press, 2016), 27-63.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, Chapter 2-3.

redemption.'²⁹ Murray then defined the 'Adam-God relationship as the *Adamic administration*.³⁰

According to McGowan, a systematic and historical theologian, who develops the covenant theology with the trajectory of *Adamic administration*, claims that the priority of law over grace is the most standout criticism of J. B. Torrance on the covenant theology, it is the confusion of covenant and contract that led to a bilateral covenant.³¹ McGowan agrees with the claim of Torrance but clarifies that there were different strands in covenant theology. McGowan surveys some theologians, both proponents and the opponents of the covenant of works to show to us the issue over the debates of the law-grace will remain unsettled if we were to hold on to the doctrine of the covenant of works. One can be mistaken thinking that all proponents of the covenant of works put law before grace. It is not so as noted by McGowan, in fact the very first person he surveys is Thomas Boston, a proponent of the covenant of works yet emphasized on grace. Nevertheless, according to McGowan, as far as Boston asserted the importance of grace in covenant,³² 'faced opposition from other covenant theologians who put the law before grace and became legalistic in their thinking', even among the proponent of the covenant of works.³³

In summary, based on McGowan's study, even though some proponents of the covenant of works will try to emphasize grace, the term 'covenant' & 'works' itself, fail to reflect the essential elements of a covenant (unilateral, grace before law) and the

²⁹ J. V. Fesko, *The Covenant of Works: Origins, Development, and Reception of the Doctrine* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2020), 193-194.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 194 see also: Murray, 'Adamic Administration,' 48.

³¹ A. T. B. McGowan, *Adam, Christ and Covenant: Exploring Headship Theology* (London: Apollos, imprint of Inter-Varsity Press, 2016), 45.

³² A. T. B. McGowan, *The federal theology of Thomas Boston*. (Edinburgh, Scotland: Paternoster Pub., 1997), 11

³³ A. T. B. McGowan, *Adam, Christ and Covenant: Exploring Headship Theology* (London: Apollos, imprint of Inter-Varsity Press, 2016), 14, 27-29

disagreement law-grace dichotomy remained unsettled, even among the proponent of the covenant of works.

1.1.4 McGowan's Headship Theology as a Response to Law-grace Dichotomy

With the various strands of Reformed covenant theology and the tension of law-grace debates within the Reformed circle, McGowan seeks to retain the strengths of covenant theology by separating the ideas of 'union with Adam/Christ' and God's covenantal dealings with His people.³⁴ In *Adam, Christ and Covenant*, he proposes headship theology (in Adam/in Christ) over the covenant of works, a proposal that he claims to develop from Murray's standpoint, and 'does not require a covenantal underpinning.'³⁵

McGowan centers his headship theology on 1 Corinthians 15 and Romans 5 like many covenant theologians.³⁶ He argues that these two passages describe the Adam-Christ parallel and do not refer to a covenant; while all in Adam die, all in Christ will resurrect to eternal life and blessedness.³⁷ In fact, the headship theology is similar to the traditional Reformed covenant theology but just with the covenant of works removed and view other eternal blessings under the framework of headship.

McGowan argues that his headship theology helps us deal with some of the problematic issues above and be liberated from the strictures of non-biblical terminology and allows us to 'read covenants in Scripture as the means by which God relates to his people, Israel, and the church.'³⁸

³⁴ Ibid., 13.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., Introduction, Headship Theology

³⁷ Ibid., 107

³⁸ A. T. B. McGowan, in *Adam, Christ and Covenant: Exploring Headship Theology* (London: Apollos, imprint of Inter-Varsity Press, 2016), 119.

McGowan's headship theology can be summarized as all who are in Adam (the first head) die, while all who are in Christ (the second head) will live.³⁹ The covenant simply describes how God relates to Israel and the church.⁴⁰ In other words, there is no covenant of works; headship theology and covenant theology can be viewed separately.⁴¹

Under his headship theology, we are either in Adam or in Christ, and covenant is generally applied to the people of God. Since the covenant is gracious, the law is not to be seen as a means to get oneself right before God, not even to say merit, but rather to be seen under the context of grace. McGowan quotes Wright, 'now that you're in the covenant, here is the law to keep'⁴²

It is perceived that; McGowan can still be regarded as a covenant theologian. Nevertheless, his covenant theology is totally different with WCF, as he develops a system where headship and covenant are separated. Therefore, an embracement of his headship theology would mean a need to rewrite most of the WCF, WLC, and WSC that are related to covenant.⁴³

1.1.5 A Consideration of Fesko's Covenant of Works

As far as McGowan's hope in bringing ecumenical unity on this issue within the Reformed circle, the result was not so; there are critics and supports of McGowan's proposal.⁴⁴ As Woolford argues, the separation of headship and covenant will lead to

³⁹ Tom Woolford, *Source: Churchman*, 131 no 2 Sum 2017, 186.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² A. T. B. McGowan, in *Adam, Christ and Covenant: Exploring Headship Theology* (London: Apollos, imprint of Inter-Varsity Press, 2016), 156

Quoted from: N. T. Wright, *Justification: God's Plan & Paul's Vision* Downers Grove, (IL: IVP Academic, an imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2016), 53.

⁴³ Westminster Standard is not infallible and is revisable, see WCF 31.4, 'We affirm that the Westminster Standards are fallible, that is, that it is possible in principle that they may err, and, further, that they are open to revision.'

⁴⁴ a. The critics from the proponents of the covenant of works on McGowan's book:
i. Tom Woolford, *Source: Churchman*, 131 no 2 Sum 2017, 186-188.

the understanding of corporate imputation without a covenant, 'a federal headship without a *foedus*.'⁴⁵ He further argues that:

Similarly, Christ's righteousness being a corporate act for those in him (by faith) is not adequately connected to God's plan and purpose for his people since Abraham without the notion of Christ as covenant Mediator.⁴⁶

If the imputation of Adam's sin is without a covenantal context, what about the imputation of Christ's righteousness upon us? Can it be explained without referring to the covenant? Perkins rightfully observes that McGowan describes the new covenant as being 'through Jesus Christ' but not the 'head of the new covenant' in order not to undermine his thesis that headship and covenant are separate.⁴⁷ Perkins also comments that McGowan calls for exegesis, but he himself provides little exegetical argument.⁴⁸ Furthermore, as McGowan emphasizes grace over law, he seems to ignore the condemning role and typology of the Mosaic law.⁴⁹ While McGowan separates headship from covenant due to the law-grace dichotomy in the covenant of works, Fesko's works demonstrate the relationship of law, in his defense of the covenant of works covenant and federalism. Since the law, covenant, and federalism are the fundamental aspects of covenant theology, with a proper understanding of these aspects and their relationship, the doctrine of the covenant of works might be valid, and the headship might not need to be separated from the covenant.

ii. Harrison Perkins, *Source: International Journal of Reformed Theology and Life: Unio Cum Christo*, Vol. 3, No.1 April 2017, 276-279

b. The opponent of the covenant of works that quoted McGowan's book as support:

i. J. M. Burger, 'The Story of God's Covenants: A Biblical-Theological Investigation with Systematic Consequences.' *Calvin Theological Journal* 54, no. 2 (November 2019): 267–299.

ii. Bradley G. Green, *Covenant and Commandment: Works, Obedience and Faithfulness in the Christian Life*, ed. D. A. Carson, vol. 33, *New Studies in Biblical Theology* (England; Downers Grove, IL: Apollos; InterVarsity Press, 2014).

⁴⁵ Tom Woolford, *Source: Churchman*, 131 no 2 Sum 2017, 186-188

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Harrison Perkins, *Source: International Journal of Reformed Theology and Life: Unio Cum Christo*, Vol. 3, No.1 April 2017, 276-279

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

In the light of the unsettled debates of the law-grace dichotomy, McGowan deals extensively on Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15 as his basis to oppose the doctrine of the covenant of works and build his headship theology.⁵⁰ Fesko, on the contrary, deals with several passages, showing us that the doctrine of the covenant of works is built based on intra-canonical passages.

1.1.6 Reexamination of the Law-Grace Dichotomy

Not only does Fesko devote one entire chapter on 'Adam, Israel, and Christ', he does also relate Adam and Christ as the federal head in most of the chapters.⁵¹ In this chapter, Fesko tries to prove that:

The Adam-Christ relationship demonstrates that God imputed the respective actions of each federal head to those whom they respectively represent, which is covenantal activity.⁵²

To prove this, Fesko compares Adam's and Israel's *nomos*-governed states and the term that Paul used (law & transgression) to demonstrate how the doctrine of the covenant appears in Romans 5:12-21,⁵³ and this approach is totally opposite to McGowan, who simply concludes that this passage is not referring to covenant but emphasizing on *in Adam* and *in Christ*.

According to McGowan, the liberation of headship from the covenant will help us view the law in the context of grace and that we who were sinners are now the people of God, do law out of love. On the contrary, with the doctrine of the covenant of works, though the probationary test is over, the covenant is not abolished. The covenant of works is still in effect, and we are still obliged to fulfill its terms by a perfect

⁵⁰ A. T. B. McGowan, in *Adam, Christ and Covenant: Exploring Headship Theology* (London: Apollos, imprint of Inter-Varsity Press, 2016), 104-116.

⁵¹ J. V. Fesko, *Adam and the Covenant of Works* (Great Britain: Mentor, 2021)

⁵² *Ibid.*, 282.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

commitment to the law.⁵⁴ The obligation is still valid to Adam and extended to us, as God did not have a covenant to Adam only, but to humanity with Adam as the federal head.⁵⁵ The problem is that we all sinned because 'sin came into the world through one man'⁵⁶ (original sin), and contrary to the principle of Pelagianism, we cannot fulfill the law (i.e., the covenant of works) but are 'under a curse'.⁵⁷ Fesko describes it using immediate imputation in a legal framework.⁵⁸

According to Fesko, God did not abolish the covenant of works but sent Christ as the One will faithfully fulfill it.⁵⁹ Christ has fulfilled all the requirements of the covenant of works. He obeyed all the law (active obedience) and submitted Himself to die, suffering the penalty of the law at the cross (passive obedience) for the propitiation.⁶⁰ God made the covenant of grace with us through Christ, imputing His righteousness to us immediately, that we no longer have to do the works to enjoy blessing in a covenantal relationship, but just to have faith in Christ.⁶¹ In Adam, the representative of man, all need to face death, but in Christ, the head of all the elect, we will have life in the covenant of grace.⁶²

⁵⁴ Richard P. Belcher Jr., 'The Covenant of Works in the Old Testament,' in *Covenant Theology: Biblical, Theological, and Historical Perspectives*, ed. Guy Prentiss Waters, J. Nicholas Reid, and John R. Muether (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 70.

See also J. V. Fesko, *Adam and the Covenant of Works* (Great Britain: Mentor, 2021), 13-42, 199-216 on historical analysis and his exegesis on Lev. 18:5 'Do this and live'

⁵⁵ J. V. Fesko, *Adam and the Covenant of Works* (Great Britain: Mentor, 2021), 301-313

See also: Phillip D. R. Griffiths, *Covenant Theology: A Reformed Baptist Perspective* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2016), Chapter 4: The Plight of Man Under the First Adam

⁵⁶ Rom. 5:12

⁵⁷ Gal. 3:10. The law of the covenant of works is not simply a specific act of the prohibition of eating from the tree of the knowledge, it is an absolute submission to the commandment of God's law. See section 3.1 especially 3.1.2 for details.

⁵⁸ J. V. Fesko, *Adam and the Covenant of Works* (Great Britain: Mentor, 2021), 296

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ J. V. Fesko, *Death in Adam, Life in Christ: The Doctrine of Imputation* (Great Britain: Mentor, 2016), 101, 310.

⁶¹ J. V. Fesko, *Adam and the Covenant of Works* (Great Britain: Mentor, 2021), 357-376

⁶² J. V. Fesko, *Death in Adam, Life in Christ: The Doctrine of Imputation* (Great Britain: Mentor, 2016), 307-315.

Because of the law-grace dichotomy in the covenant of works as argued by McGowan, he attempts to separate headship from the covenant. Nevertheless, from Fesko's works, the relationship of law, covenant, and federal headship are inseparable.

1.1.7 Overview

We have briefly described the overview of the Reformed covenant theology and its importance. One of the challenges to Reformed covenant theology is the doctrine of the covenant of works even with Reformed circles, and the main issue is the law-grace dichotomy. To break away from the debates over the issue of law-grace dichotomy, a contemporary Reformed theologian, McGowan, discards the doctrine of the covenant of works, and develops headship theology without a 'covenantal underpinning.' In contrast, another contemporary Reformed theologian, Fesko, defends the covenant of works and that from his works, we could see an intact relationship of law, covenant, Adam, and Christ. Both theologians are historical and systematic, yet with opposite arguments (law-grace dichotomy versus relationship of law and covenant) and result.

1.2 Research Question

Therefore, the research question in this thesis is: What is the critical solution to McGowan's headship theology that addresses the law-grace dichotomy in the covenant of works? The sub-questions are:

1. How does Fesko's understanding of law and covenant compare to McGowan's opinion on the issue of the law-grace dichotomy in the covenant of works?
2. Is the headship and covenant separation necessary, as McGowan proposed? Or rather, federal headship and covenant are inseparable and vital in a comprehensive understanding of Reformed covenant theology.

1.3 Research Objectives

This research attempts to adopt Fesko's understanding of law & covenant, Adam & Christ, in conducting a critical analysis of McGowan's opposition to the covenant of works (specifically due to the law-grace dichotomy) and his development of headship theology.

1.4 Thesis Statement

McGowan's opposition to the covenant of works, specifically on the law-grace dichotomy, can be answered by Fesko's understanding of law & covenant and Adam & Christ; there is no need for the separation of headship and covenant. In contrast, federalism remains essential for a more comprehensive understanding of the covenant theology and leads us to a better appreciation of Christ and His works.

1.5 Literature Review

Although there have been debates on the covenant of works from the seventeenth century, only 'a few monographs devoted exclusively to the covenant of works.'⁶³

The debates between the proponents and the oppositions of the covenant of works are surging in these ten years. Nevertheless, to my entry, most monographs on either side do not provide historical surveys and engage in historical dialogues of both sides except McGowan's *Adam, Christ and Covenant: Exploring Headship Theology* and Fesko works: (1) *The Covenant of Works: Origins, Development, and Reception of the Doctrine*, (2) *Adam and the Covenant of Works*. Both McGowan and Fesko deal with the subject with a historical and systematical approach but come to a very different

⁶³ J. V. Fesko, *Adam and the Covenant of Works* (Great Britain: Mentor, 2021), xxv. According to Fesko, see, e.g., Richard C. Barcellos, *The Covenant of Works: Its Confessional and Scriptural Basis* (Palmdale, CA: Reformed Baptist Academic Press, 2016); idem, *Getting the Garden Right: Adam's Work and God's Rest in Light of Christ* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2017); Rowland S. Ward, *God and Adam: Reformed Theology and the Creation Covenant* (2003; Lansvale, Australia: Tulip Publishing, 2019).

conclusion on the covenant of works (McGowan as an opponent and Fesko a proponent). Therefore, it is interesting to conduct a comparative analysis on both.

Even though McGowan's proposal seems to demise the covenant of works, only two critical reviews on his works are conducted in these five years, and two papers even cited his work in favor of his position.⁶⁴ None of the books published in these five years have critiques on McGowan's works; except Fesko's *Adam and the Covenant of Works*, which indirectly answers McGowan's critiques on the covenant of works. However, it does not have any comment on McGowan's headship theology.

In the light of the above, this thesis attempts to build a bridge in the form of a dialogue between McGowan and Fesko's works on covenant theology. The analysis in this thesis will be based mainly on the works of McGowan: *Adam, Christ and Covenant: Exploring Headship Theology* and Fesko: (1) *The Covenant of Works: Origins, Development, and Reception of the Doctrine* (2) *Adam and the Covenant of Works*. Other book reviews on these works and the papers related to headship theology and covenant of works will be reviewed and be incorporated as secondary references in the analysis of this thesis.

1.6 Research Method and Limitation

This thesis will adopt a qualitative deductive method to:

1. Carry out the systematical study on:
 - a. McGowan's analysis on the law & covenant, law & grace in the covenant, and his development of headship theology. (Chapter 2)
 - b. Fesko's analysis of law & covenant, law & grace in the covenant, and federalism: Adam & Christ. (Chapter 3)

⁶⁴ See footnote 44

2. Conduct a systematic analysis on McGowan's work based on Fesko's works to demonstrate the relationship of law & covenant and the importance of federalism in Reformed covenant theology. (Chapter 4)

Although the works of both McGowan and Fesko are historical and systematical, this thesis will be heavily on systematical analysis (i.e., to see the logical coherency⁶⁵ of their analysis and deduced theological understanding). Nevertheless, other systematic theologians for the proponent and the opponent of the covenant of works will be referred to as a secondary source. Apart from that, their historical analysis will be summarized and compared in this thesis. The purpose of this summary and comparison is to provide background information on the challenges of the covenant of works. McGowan's and Fesko's theological development can be evaluated more objectively with this background information.

Further exegesis and biblical are essential for the future development of this thesis, and it will not be carried out at this stage. Still, the exegetical analysis of McGowan and Fesko will be analyzed within the framework of the coherency of covenant theology.

⁶⁵ (1) How consistent are their critics and development of theology. (2) with their understanding of how are major doctrines related to each other under the framework of their covenant theology. For logical coherency in systematic theology, see: Richard L. Pratt, "What Is Systematic Theology? Forum," thirdmill.org, accessed January 11, 2022, <https://thirdmill.org/seminary/lesson.asp/vid/124#qi3>.