THE FEDERAL THEOLOGY AND THE HISTORY OF REDEMPTION IN JONATHAN EDWARDS’S BIBLICAL EXEGESIS

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Abstract: This article examines the relationship between Jonathan Edwards’s federal theology and his biblical exegesis. While there is substantial discussion of Edwards’s view of the covenant, no one has addressed the interrelationship of the federal theology and exegetical perspective in Edwards. Edwards developed his federal theology from his biblical exegesis focusing on the theme of history of redemption. Edwards’s federal schema stands with the central soteriological topics in his theology. He believes the promises in the covenant of redemption were revealed to God’s people in the covenant of grace and accomplished by Christ’s fulfillment of the covenant of works. Moreover, the full effect of Christ’s work of redemption will be wholly revealed through the entire history of redemption which culminates at the end of the world. This implies that Edwards’s exegetical view of federal theology concentrates on the historical aspects in which he emphasizes redemptive history.

Key words: Jonathan Edwards, the federal theology, biblical exegesis, the history of redemption, the covenant of redemption, the covenant of works, the covenant of grace

I. INTRODUCTION

Perry Miller contended that while Edwards abandoned “the whole covenant scheme,” his predecessors (the first generation of New Englanders) were advocates of the federal theology, which is far different from Calvin’s theology.1 In Miller’s view, the federal theology is an “adroit and highly legalistic formulation.”2 Since then, Miller’s work has served as a milestone in Edwards and New England theological studies among many scholars.3

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2 Miller, Jonathan Edwards, 30.

After Miller, Peter DeJong, Joseph Haroutunian, Sydney Mead, Sydney Ahlstrom, and William McLoughlin claimed that the federal theology is a departure from typical Edwardian theology and Edwards’s view of covenant. Moreover, Miller’s theological path has been criticized by some scholars. For example, Carl W. Bogue demonstrated that covenant theology is not at odds with Edwards’s views. More recently, McClymond and McDermott traced the development of Edwards’s view of covenant through three different periods. Offering a corrective to McClymond and McDermott, Cornelis van der Klijff and Wilem van Vlastuin found a focus on redemptive history in Edwards’s view of the covenant. Thus, it becomes
clear that Miller and his followers simply failed to see the federal schema in Edwards.

While there is substantial discussion of Edwards’s view of the covenant, only a few works have addressed the question of his view of the interrelationship of federal theology and exegesis. Importantly, R. C. Nichols is the first to find that Edwards’s concept of “redemption history and a covenantal system” is a framework to harmonize the OT and NT. In a short essay (2014), Garth E. Pauley criticized Edwards for misunderstanding Deut 32:35, and using it to construct his particular doctrine. Pauley claims that Edwards’s use of federal theology is applied to interpreting the text at the expense of understanding its original context. While referring to the federal theology’s relation to canonical exegesis, Sweeney does not have a detailed explanation of the nature of the interrelationship of federal theology and exegesis. Despite their emphasis on Edwards’s “increasing focus on redemptive history and the historical application of the eternal covenant,” van der Knijff and van Vlastuin do not show how Edwards’s federal theology focuses in detail on the historical aspects of the covenants.

Still, van der Knijff’s and van Vlastuin’s emphasis on the historical character of the covenant of grace serves as the basis for this essay. This paper examines Edwards’s doctrine of the federal theology’s relation to his biblical exegesis, focusing on how the federal schema is described in terms of the history of redemption. This paper will demonstrate that Edwards’s view of the federal theology is based


8 Ibid.


11 Ibid., 107–9. Pauley’s criticism of Edwards’s interpretation of Deut 32:35 is based on the fact that “every modern-day Bible commentary interprets the verse to mean that at some given time Yahweh will destroy the adversaries of Israel that he uses to punish Israel for being unfaithful to the covenant” and the fact that Matthew Henry’s and Matthew Poole’s Bible commentaries that Edwards relied on to interpret the text show the same interpretation with modern-day Bible commentaries.

12 While van der Knijff and van Vlastuin have tried to show Edwards’s increasing interest in the historical aspects of the covenants, they did not show how the covenants for Edwards have become concretely historicized in time. Their work not only relies on secondary sources such as Bogue, McClymond, and Gerstner, but also seems to fail to present concrete evidence, assigning only about two pages to their argument. See van der Knijff and van Vlastuin, “The Development in Jonathan Edwards’ Covenant View,” 278–81.

on his biblical exegesis, which plays a foundational role to reveal the nature of redemptive history in which historical aspects of a covenant stand out. The first section supports this claim by examining the similarities and differences of the concept of conditionality in the federal schema (the covenant of redemption, works, and grace). The paper will then show how the federal schema emerges from the biblical text. In doing so, it will be noted that Edwards carefully frames the doctrine of covenant, which sets him apart from the traditionally Reformed view. Finally, this paper will demonstrate that Edwards’s biblical exegesis presents the federal theology in terms of redemptive history. It will be seen that typology is an integral element of revealing the history of redemption.

II. CONDITIONALITY: SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE THREE COVENANTS

To what extent do the covenants of redemption, works, and grace differ and to what degree are they similar? This question helps clarify a focal point in Edwards’s federal theology. For Edwards, the answer lies in conditionality. In other words, his view of conditionality appears to be crucial in distinguishing between the three covenants (redemption, grace, and works). Moreover, the conditionality of the three covenants is a key to understanding Edwards’s interest in redemptive history.

1. Conditionality in the relationship between the covenants of redemption and grace. Conditionality for Edwards is fundamental in distinguishing between the covenant of redemption and the covenant of grace. Edwards writes:

All the promises of each of these covenants [the covenant of redemption and the covenant of grace] are conditional. To suppose that there are any promises of the covenant of grace, or any covenant promises, that are not conditional promises, seems an absurdity and contradiction. These covenants differ in their conditions. The condition of the covenant that God has made with Jesus Christ as a public person, is all that Christ has done and suffered to procure redemption. The condition of Christ’s covenant with his people or of the marriage covenant between him and men, is that they should close with him and adhere to him.14

The covenants differ in terms of their conditions. For example, the covenant of redemption is different from the covenant of grace, since the conditions of the former are Christ’s works for redemption, and the condition of the latter is to be in Christ.

Moreover, the covenants are distinct in relation to their subjects. The covenant of redemption is a covenant that “God makes with believers in Christ [Christ and his people],” while the covenant of grace is “the covenant of union between

Christ and his spouse [marriage covenant].”\textsuperscript{15} In the covenant of redemption, God transacts with Christ as the head, thereby transacting with believers in Christ. On the other hand, believers in the covenant of grace become “parties contracting” with Christ.\textsuperscript{16} Thus, the parties in the covenant of redemption are God and Christ as the head (to whom Christ’s posterity belong), and those in the covenant of grace are Christ and his people.

Furthermore, the covenants differ in their promises. The promise in the covenant of redemption includes “justification, the privileges and benefits of his children, the eternal inheritance and kingdom,” all of which comes from his work of redemption.\textsuperscript{17} On the contrary, “the sum” of rewards in the covenant of grace is “communion,” which implies that Christ gives himself to his people.\textsuperscript{18} Thus, the covenant of redemption is distinguished from the covenant of grace with respect to its content, subjects, and promises.

This does not mean, however, that the covenant of redemption is wholly separate from the covenant of grace. Rather, the former is closely related to the latter. In terms that the promises made with Christ as a head (the covenant of redemption) should be “revealed” and “directed” to both the head and members, the covenant of redemption includes promises such as “eternal life,” “justification,” and “regeneration.”\textsuperscript{19}

Thus, it is noted that the promises in the covenant of redemption are the same as those in the covenant of grace. We see this when Edwards writes the following about the covenant of grace:

This promise of the covenant of Christ with his people, implies eternal life of both soul and body. The happiness of eternal life, it consists in the enjoyment of Christ and in communion with him or partaking with him in the happiness and glory of his reward, who is rewarded with the eternal life and glory of both soul and body. It includes sanctification and perseverance: these are included in the enjoyment of Christ and communion with Christ. It includes justification; this also is a part of believers’ communion with Christ, for they in their justification are but partakers of Christ’s justification. They are pardoned and justified in Christ's acquittance and justification as Mediator. The promises of the incarnation of Christ and of his obedience and sacrifice, were included in the covenant between Christ and believers before these things were actually accomplished.\textsuperscript{20}

As with the covenant of redemption, promises such as “eternal life,” sanctification,” and “perseverance” are included in the covenant of grace.


\textsuperscript{17} Edwards, “Miscellanies,” no. 1091, \textit{WJE Online}, 20:475.

\textsuperscript{18} Edwards, “Miscellanies,” no. 617, \textit{WJE Online}, 18:149.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
However, Edwards still maintains that there are some differences in the promises of both covenants.\textsuperscript{21} The promises in the covenant of redemption are called a condition in the covenant of grace occasionally. For example, regeneration is considered as “one of the promises of the covenant of the Father with Christ [the covenant of redemption],” even though it is simultaneously a “condition in the covenant of Christ with his people [the covenant of grace].” The same is true of “the first closing with Christ” and “perseverance,” which are conditions of the covenant of grace, and at the same time promises in the covenant of redemption.\textsuperscript{22} Thus, the similarities and differences between the covenants of redemption and grace come down to Edwards’s understanding of condition.

It is worth noting that Edward believed the consent of humanity plays an important role in making the covenant of grace valid. He writes, “The revelation and offer of the gospel is not properly called a covenant till it is consented to. As when a man courts a woman [and] offers himself to her, his offer is not called a covenant, though he be obliged by it on his part. Neither do I think that the gospel is called a covenant in Scripture, but only when the engagements are mutual.”\textsuperscript{23} Edward argues that “the revelation and offer of the gospel” is called a covenant when it is consented to by believers.\textsuperscript{24} This mutuality of the covenant of grace indicates that the covenant is actually completed at a specific point in history by Christ’s people, as Bogue points out.\textsuperscript{25} In this sense, Edwards states that “the condition of Christ’s covenant with his people or of the marriage covenant between him and men, is that they should close with him and adhere to him.”\textsuperscript{26} “Closing with” and “adhering to” Christ do not mean that believers should accomplish the condition by their merit.\textsuperscript{27} Rather, conditionality for Edwards is focused on the historical realization of a covenant at a point in time in which the members “come into being.”\textsuperscript{28} Thus Edwards writes as follows:

But the covenant of grace, if thereby we understand the covenant between Christ himself and his church or his members, is conditional as to us: the proper condition of it, which is a yielding to Christ’s woosings and accepting his offers and closing with him as a redeemer and spiritual husband, is to be performed by

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 150.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{24} Edwards even allows a covenant to be called a “free offer and exhibition” from God. Thus, as van der Knijff and van Vlastuin have pointed out, the covenant of grace for Edwards is “even synonymous with the gospel.” See, van der Knijff and van Vlastuin, “Development in Jonathan Edwards’ Covenant View,” 276.
\textsuperscript{27} Edwards says, “if Adam had stood and persevered in obedience, he would have been made happy by mere bounty [and] goodness; for God was not obliged to reward Adam for his perfect obedience any otherwise than by covenant, for Adam by standing would not have merited happiness.” See “Glorious Grace [Zech 4:7],” in \textit{WJE Online}, vol. 10: \textit{Sermons and Discourses 1720–1723} (ed. Wilson H. Kimnach; Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale University, 2008), 391–92.
\textsuperscript{28} Edwards, “Miscellaneies,” no. 1091, \textit{WJE Online}, 20:475.
us. ... propriety in Christ is her believing in Christ, or her [Christ’s spouse] soul’s active union with him.29

As seen in the words “accepting his offers,” the condition of the covenant of grace is nothing other than Christ’s spouse’s believing in Christ at a point in time. Thus, the covenant of redemption differs from the covenant of grace with respect to the fact that the latter is realized at a moment in time.

2. Conditionality in the relationship between the covenants of grace and works. The historical aspect in the conditionality of the covenant is much more evident in Edwards’s view of the relationship between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. The covenant of works is made with "the first Adam," while the covenant of grace is made “with the second Adam.”30 The condition of the first covenant is “Adam’s standing,” while the condition of the second covenant is “Christ’s standing.”31

However, the condition in the covenant of works is not contrasted to the condition of the covenant of grace. Rather, Edwards sees the relationship between the covenant of works and grace in terms of the history of redemption. He states that, “Christ came into the world to fulfill and answer the covenant of works, that is the covenant that is to stand forever as a rule of judgment, and that is the covenant that we had broken, and that was the covenant that must be fulfilled.”32 This statement seems to contain two crucial points: (1) the covenant of works was supposed to be fulfilled by Christ’s works of redemption; and (2) the conditions of the covenant of works have to do with “a rule of judgment,” under which all humanity will be held accountable at the end of the world.

Edwards insists that even if Adam kept the covenant of works, he would be saved not according to the covenant’s condition, but “of grace.”33 This line of thought is clear where Edwards states: “the covenant of works; which never yet was abrogated, but is a covenant stands in full force to all eternity without the failing of one title.”34 In another place, Edwards argues, “We are indeed now under the covenant of works so, that if we are perfectly righteous we can challenge salvation.”35 At first glance, it might seem that Edwards believes people can earn their salvation by fulfilling the condition of the covenant of works.

However, the nuance in Edwards is totally different. He argues that there is a difference between “the children of Israel” and “us” in relation to the covenant of works: one covenant is between God and the children of Israel, and the other between God and us. The main purpose of the covenant of works regarding the chil-

29 Ibid., 478.
31 Ibid.
Children of Israel is to help them see “that they could not challenge anything from those promises [on the ground] of obedience, trusted only to the mere undeserved mercy of God … only of mere mercy.” With respect to the covenant of works relating to us, Edwards argues that, “to us God has plainly declared the impossibility of obtaining life by that covenant … and lets us know clearly how we are made partakers of that grace.”

Neither the covenant of works with the children of Israel nor that with us leaves a loophole through which we can earn our salvation.

Along these lines, Edwards emphasizes that in the OT, “the church, which was then in its infant [state], could not bear a revelation of the covenant of grace in plain terms.” He argues that now, for people under the covenant of grace, the gracious character of the covenant of works glows much brighter than for those when the church was in its “infant [state].” This shows that in terms of the economy of the NT era, the degree of revelation in the covenant of works becomes much more intense when compared to the OT. Thus, Edwards understands the condition of the covenant of works in terms of the covenant of grace, so that the conditionality of the covenant of works could be an important means of Christ’s fulfilling the works of redemption and judging humanity at the end of the world.

As seen, conditionality for Edwards is important in distinguishing between the covenants of redemption, grace, and works. Moreover, the conditions in the covenants show the historical character in both the relationship between the covenants of redemption and grace and between the covenants of grace and works. In the next section, this paper will explore how Edwards develops his federal schema from biblical exegesis.

III. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE FEDERAL THEOLOGY AND BIBLICAL EXEGESIS

To rightly deal with the relationship between Edwards’s federal theology and biblical exegesis, it is necessary to understand what Edwards’s exegetical principles are. Edwards’s understanding of the covenants rests on both Reformed exegetical tradition and his own exegetical considerations that reflect a concern for the texts of Scripture.

1. Edwards’s interpretation of the biblical texts within Reformed canonical exegesis. Edwards’s interpretation of the Bible is based on Reformed canonical exegesis. In “Miscellanies,” no. 828, entitled “Rule of Faith. Scripture. History. Fathers,” Edwards insists that the interpretation of Scripture must be “more independent” than the interpretation of any other book, because Scripture is ordered by the design of God. This signifies that Scripture is sufficient for interpreting itself. As Douglas Sweeney has shown well, Edwards maintains that every single text of Scripture should be read with respect to the canon.39

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37 Ibid.
39 Douglas Sweeney, Edwards and Exegesis, 56.
Moreover, Edwards emphasizes the possibility of multiple meanings when interpreting the Bible. He says that Scripture includes “various distinct things in its sense,” because God’s design of Scripture allows various senses in relation to its interpretation. Edwards argues:

> It is becoming of him who is infinite in understanding and has everything in full and perfect view at once, and when he speaks, sees all things that have any manner of agreement with his words, and knows how to adapt his words to many things, and so to speak infinitely more comprehensively than others, and to speak so as naturally to point forth many things.

Edwards’s emphasis on the multiplicity of meanings appears in various places in Scripture. For example, Edwards considers the OT expression “out of Egypt have I called my son” (Hos. 11:1). This verse is quoted in the NT as a reference to “Christ being called out of Egypt when a child.” In revealing the meaning of the verse, Edwards notes that “Christ is sometimes in the Prophets called ‘Israel.’” On the other hand, “Israel” not only means “a child” as a young nation, but also “generation” who “was literally children” before God. Accordingly, the word “son” signifies both Christ and Israel.

Edward also emphasizes multiple meanings in his “Blank Bible” note on Dan 5:25–28. He explores the episode of Belshazzar’s feast, when the handwriting of God appeared on the wall. Edwards argues that the words Tekel and Pharsin “signify both in Hebrew and Chaldee”: “Tekel, that signifies in Chaldee, ‘thou art weighed,’ and in Hebrew, ‘thou art too light’; Upharsin, which should have been rendered Pharsin or Peres; Pharsin in Hebrew signifies the Persians; Paresin in Chaldee signifies ‘dividing.’”

From this, he argues that (1) the words of the message could have multiple meanings, and (2) when the same words not only allow “two senses” or “translations entirely different,” but also are not related to one another “as type and antitype,” the reason is due to the Holy Spirit who “has respect to both oftentimes.” Finally, Edwards draws a conclusion in relation to this passage that since “both are instructive and agreeable to the analogy of faith, we may well interpret ‘em of both.”

These exegetical expositions of the Bible (Edwards’s view of canonicity and reading multiple and difficult meanings in a text), as Sweeney argues, demonstrates that Edwards falls within the “twin interpretive pillars” of traditional Protestant readings of the Bible. That is, Edwards upholds (1) the ‘analogy of Scripture’ (analogia Scripturae),” which means that “individual texts were read in light of other texts in other parts of holy Scripture”; and (2) “the ‘analogy of faith’ (analogia fidei),” which implies that “difficult texts were read in view of the kerygmatic core
This shows that Edwards’s biblical exegesis appears to fall in line with Reformed tradition presented in the Westminster Confession.\footnote{Douglas Sweeney, \textit{Edwards and Exegesis}, 55–56; Richard A. Muller, \textit{Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology} (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 33.}

2. The federal theology from the text of Scripture. However, it must be noted that although Edwards’s view of interpreting the Bible is in line with the Reformed exegetical tradition, he came to his covenant schema as the conclusion drawn from a large body of complex scriptural texts. For example, Edwards finds his covenant scheme in varied texts where he extrapolates the relationship of the first Adam and the second Adam (Christ), original righteousness and original sin, total depravity, imputation of sin, and so forth. Moreover, while Edwards consciously locates himself as a son of the Reformation, he does not abstain from a creative exposition of the covenant view.

First of all, there are various texts that form the basis of Edwards’s federal schema. Edwards, in a sermon on Gen 3:11, explains the relationship between Adam and his posterity. Edwards writes:

\begin{quote}
Tis said in the 8. v. of the Context that our first P\[arents\]. heard the voice of the L\[ord\].---- by which it appears that There was something external that G\[od\]. was wont to manifest hims\[elf\]. by of whose approach [\_] they could have noticed\[ed\] the external sense And adam Easily distinguish\[ed\] the voice [\_] even [\?] – knew the gate or the sound of the feet --- they walk what heard at a dist --- tis said that our first P\[arents\]. hid thems\[elves\]. when they . H --- They were very guilty & had a sense of their own guilt in their Consciences which made [th]em to fly & hide from G. How different is the Case with [th]em now from what it was before they sin before they were far from flying & hiding when they perceived G. approaching …
\end{quote}

The word “first parent” signifies that Adam was a representative of mankind. In this line, Edwards continues to say that Adam “stood in viz that he was a head to the Rest.”\footnote{Douglas Sweeney, \textit{Edwards and Exegesis}, 56. According to Westminster Confession of Faith, “The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself; and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture … it may be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly.” See \textit{The Confession of Faith and Catechisms, Agreed upon by the Assembly of Divines at Westminster: Together with Their Humble Advice Concerning Church Government and Ordination of Ministers} (London: Robert Bostock, 1649), 1.9.}

After emphasizing the term “first parent,” Edwards deals with the states of Adam’s conscience and the consequences to his posterity of breaking the covenant. In doing so, he defines terms such as original righteousness, reward, punishment, and depravity of soul throughout the entire sermon on Gen 3:11.\footnote{Ibid., \textit{passim}.}

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\item \footnote{Ibid., line 7v.}
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It is worth mentioning that Edwards’s covenant scheme, seen in his exegesis of Gen 3:11, also refers to various texts in other Scriptures. For example, in describing one of the consequences of Adam’s fall, he speaks of the devil thus: “He is Represented as the F[ather] of sin Joh[n]. 8. 44 & as having the Power of Death Heb. 2. 19 & these Distinct evils are called the works of the Devil. 1 Joh[n]. 3. 8. as a Conseq[ence]. of this heinous act --- mankind fell under the Power of the Devil. the tempter that has hand --- become the G[od]. of this O50 --- prince of the Power of the air.”51 As seen, Genesis 3:11, which is a text of Edwards’s covenant schema, is related not only to the gospel of John and 1 John 3:8, which reveals the consequence of Adam’s sin, but also to Hebrews 2:19 [2:14]. Moreover, Edwards connects these verses to Rom 5:16, 1 Corinthians 15:45, and Hebrews which evinces the relationship between the first Adam and the second Adam.52

The covenantal theme also appears in Edwards’s sermons on 2 Samuel, Zechariah 4:7, and Hebrews.53 Particularly, Edwards, in sermons on Heb 9:13–14 and 9:22–24, addresses how the priesthood of Melchizedek is a type of Christ with respect to the “eternal covenant” between the Father and the Son.54 Edwards goes on to employ a large number of biblical texts when contemplating the federal schema. Among those, the following are interconnected: Exodus 28:41; Deuteronomy 1:15, 17, 21; Zechariah 6:12–13; 1 Samuel 13:14; 1 Kings 12:31, 33; 2 Kings 3:32; Leviticus 10:12, 21; 2 Chronicles 16:26; Job 9:33; Luke 4:18; John 3:34, and so on.55 Therefore, Edwards’s federal schema should be regarded as “a doctrinal construct, a conclusion from the examination and comparison of a series of biblical loci,” as Richard Muller has argued, when explicating the doctrine of the covenant of works.56

In recognizing that the federal schema is, for Edwards, ultimately from Scripture, one notes that throughout this process, Edwards carefully frames the doctrine of covenant, which differs markedly from that of traditionally Reformed views. He states:

There was a heinousness in that act of our first F that concerns Adam personally arising from the peculiar station that he stood in. It is not every thing that was in that act that Adam committed — where by it was a heinous act in [-] him

50 In his manuscripts, Edwards at times uses a circle with a dot in it to signify “world.”
51 Ibid., line 43v–43r.
52 Ibid., passim.
that is Imputed to his Posterity. But there was something peculiar in the act an
ggravation that Concerned him alone by reason of the peculiar Circumstances
that he was in as the F. of mankind that is not Imputed.57

In analyzing the distinctiveness of the heinousness of Adam’s sinful act, Edwards
notes a twofold heinousness: (1) the heinousness that Adam committed in a peculi-
ar circumstance that does not relate to his posterity; and (2) the sin of Adam as the
head of mankind that is imputed to his posterity.

When it comes to the question of the nature of heinous act of Adam which
does not concern his posterity, Edwards gives an answer in respect to both general
and particular ways. First, “the guilt of that act as it concerned adam personally
depends partly on Innumerable Circumstances that never were revealed to us.”
There were “all the thoughts & workings of heart adam had at times which might
Greatly aggravate the sin in the sight of G[od], as it concerned him” alone.58 Edwards
argues:

[We] dont Know adam did it chiefly to Gratify his wife or out of pity to her …
because he thought the fruit was exceeding pleas. to the taste & so did it to grat-
ify his sensual appetite or whether it was mainly because he thought his eyes
should be enlightend or whether it mainly was because he thought he should be
like G[od]. we dont Know precisely how far he was influenced by the Reprobata.
that the Devil made of G[od]. as false & deceitfull & saying contrary to what he
Knew.59

Therefore, “all the Particular aggravations of that act” which “are not Revealed to
us” are not imputed to us, in terms that “it is impossible for us to Know them.”60
In other words, any sinful considerations in Adam’s mind before he ate the forbid-
den fruit were not imputed to his posterity.

Second, these aggravations of Adam’s act which was “an act of murder of all
his Posterity” is only related to Adam “as arising from the peculiar Relation he
stood in.”61 Edwards argues that if this aggravation is imputed to Adam’s posterity,
it is not more than to “multiply the same guilt to the same persons over & over
again without End.”62 Therefore, the aggravation of Adam’s sin, which was of
murdering all mankind, is not imputed to his posterity. In short, the aggravation
which arises from the “circumstance that he stood” as “a head of the Rest” is not
imputed to his posterity, since such circumstance is “peculiar to him alone and
can[!]t be reckoned to his posterity.”63

In analyzing Adam’s nature in the Fall, Edwards argues that Adam lost “all his
inherent good,” though he did retain the natural image of God, and the inferior
principles of self–love, self–preservation with which he was created. As Adam was

57 Edwards, “504. Sermon on Gen. 3:11 (February 1738),” lines 3v.–4r.
58 Ibid., line 5r.
59 Ibid.
60 Ibid., line 6r.
61 Ibid.
62 Ibid., line 6v.
63 Ibid., line 7v.
stripped of “the Indwelling [of the Holy Spirit] as a Just Punishment of his Rebellion,” his posterity was “deprived of the spirit of God.” This theme is found in his well-known work *Freedom of the Will*, in which Edwards makes a distinction between natural ability and moral inability. In the book, Edwards contends that fallen humans do not have moral ability, but they maintain natural ability, thus doing justice to the human will.

Both of these distinctions (the twofold nature of heinousness of the original sin and natural ability versus moral inability) do not appear elsewhere in the Reformed orthodoxy. However, in noting Edwards’s divergence from the Reformed tradition on these points, one ought not to portray Edwards as entirely opposed to the Reformed tradition. Rather, Edwards is on the side of Augustine and Calvin in that he contends that human beings do not have a will to do good.

It still appears that Edwards is bolder than his predecessors, such as Calvin, in exploring the federal schema. Edwards does not simply reproduce the traditional view of covenant, but rather deals with it creatively. Edwards’s distinction makes a subtle but nonetheless important point: while the imputation of sin in the Reformed tradition includes even Adam’s state before eating the forbidden fruit, Edwards does not relate Adam’s first state in eating to the condition of Adam’s posterity under the covenant of grace. More importantly, this reveals that, for Edwards, the covenant of grace is focused much more on historical reality in terms of being revealed to Adam’s posterity at a moment of history.

As seen above, Edwards’s understanding of the federal schema rests on his biblical exegesis, which is in line with Reformed exegetical tradition. Nevertheless, his view of the federal schema comes from examining many texts of Scripture. As noted above, Edwards takes great pains to explicate the distinction between Adam’s states before and after the fall, thus revealing the nature of the covenant of grace. In doing so, Edwards draws out the federal schema from the biblical text through exegesis, and as a result came to a creative understanding of federal theology.

IV. HISTORICAL ASPECT IN EDWARDS’S FEDERAL THEOLOGY

In noting that Edwards’s federal schema comes from his creative consideration of a large number of biblical texts, one could rightly observe that his exegetical explication of the covenant schema is described in terms of the adaptation of the history of redemption. Moreover, this emphasis on historical covenants is more clearly articulated in Edwards’s use of typology, in which the federal schema stands out.

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64 Ibid., line 41r.
1. **Historical aspects of the covenants in the history of redemption.** For Edwards, the notion of the history of redemption is a pivotal exegetical principle. “Christ and his redemption are the great subject of the whole Bible,” writes Edwards.\(^67\) He therefore identifies a covenant in redemptive history through Christ. In his *A History of the Work of Redemption*, Edwards writes: “Now shall all the promises made to Christ by God the Father before the foundation of the world, the promises of the covenant of redemption, be fully accomplished. And Christ shall now perfectly have obtained the joy that was set before him, for which he undertook those great sufferings he underwent in his state of humiliation.”\(^68\) As noted, the promise of the covenant of redemption can only be obtained by Christ’s soteriological work, his sufferings.

This historical application of the covenant of redemption is revealed in Edwards’s various sermons. For example, Edwards’s sermon on 2 Samuel unpacks the relationship between the covenants of redemption, works, and grace briefly in terms of the fulfillment of the promises made in the covenant of redemption.\(^69\) Edwards asserts: “The Covenant of Grace is that Covenant which G[od] has Revealed to man since he failed of life by the Covenant of works. Promising Justification & Eternal life to all that believe in J. X now this Cov[enant] has those attestation and that that Give all Possible Ground of assurance that the Promises of it will be fulfilled.”\(^70\) When Adam failed to keep the covenant of works, the covenant of grace was revealed to human beings at a point in history. The promises of the covenant of redemption are fully accomplished by Christ, who fulfilled all the conditions of the covenant of works, so that all believers in the covenant of grace after the covenant of works (with Adam) could obtain the benefits of redemption such as justification and eternal life.

In the same way, Edwards, in a sermon on Zech 4:7, describes the gracious characteristics of covenant in the gospel dispensation, stating that the work of redemption is performed by “mere grace.”\(^71\) In so doing, Edwards appeals to Hag 2:3–9 indirectly by saying that “the glories of the gospel” will be far beyond that of the former glory.\(^72\) The same line of thought appears in Edwards’s sermon on Heb 9:15–16, in which the covenant of grace is regarded as “Christ’s last will and testament.”\(^73\) According to Edwards, the two testaments, the old and the new, are “the same covenant of grace,” while there are two dispensations between old and new.\(^74\)

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\(^68\) Ibid., 509.

\(^69\) Edwards, “109. Sermon on II Sam. 23:5.”

\(^70\) Edwards, “109. Sermon on II Sam. 23:5,” line 3r.


\(^72\) Ibid., 390–91.

\(^73\) Jonathan Edwards, “534. Sermon on Heb. 9:15–16 (Jan. 4, 1740),” unpublished transcription provided by Dr. Ken Minkema of the Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale University, 4. The current version of the transcription does not provide leaf numbers but does paginate the manuscript. Here I follow the pagination in the transcription.

\(^74\) Ibid.
It is noteworthy that Edwards’s view of the federal schema goes beyond explanation of these two dispensations (the covenant of grace and the covenant of works). Rather, he focuses on the future realization of both covenants at the end of the world. In his “Miscellanies,” no. 853, entitled “The Work of Redemption The End of The Work of Creation and All Works of Providence,” Edwards argues:

If we would know what is the end of the world, let us look to the end or finishing of the world, and see who appears then. That great sight that will be to be seen then, … will be Christ the Redeemer in his glory, that he has obtained by the work of redemption, that he has gone with all his redeemed with, in the perfect and complete fruits of his redemption … will be the complete accomplishment of the effect and end sought, by what Christ doth in the work of redemption.75

As noted, “the perfect and complete fruits” of Christ will be seen at the end of the world.76 This is observed in Edwards’s view of “a new Covenant [of grace]” and “a new exhibition of the covenant of works.”77 While the new covenant was accomplished spiritually through Christ’s works of redemption, its completion has not yet been fully revealed in the “visible world.”78

Another example of the historicity of the covenants can be seen in Edwards’s understanding of the covenant of works. That is, he sees the covenant of works as an historical dispensation that prepares for Christ’s redemption. For example, the covenant of works is divided into the two phases, the covenants with Adam and with Moses, in terms of redemptive history. According to Edwards, 1 Cor 1:2179 describes the nature of the covenant of works, which indicates “the wonderful wisdom of God” in preparing the way for Christ’s redemption. With respect to God’s wisdom for delivering his people, God took “a new step” by giving the Israelites “the moral law in so awful a manner at mount Sinai,” as shown in Deut 4:33, “Did ever a people hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as thou hast heard, and live?” God intentionally gave the law to the Israelites so they would realize they could not serve God by their own deeds. Edwards regards the law given at Mount Sinai as both “a new exhibition of the covenant of works” and “the rule of life.”80

As seen in the first section of the paper, the covenant of works relates to two dispensations: the Israelites in the OT and God’s church in the NT period (which brings us to the end of the world). The covenant of works is “a schoolmaster to lead to Christ,” through two means: (1) the use of the Hebrew nation “in the ages

76 Ibid.
79 In Edwards’s words, “For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.” See Edwards, History of the Works of Redemption, WJE Online, 9:180.
80 Ibid.
of the Old Testament,” and (2) “the use of God’s church throughout all ages to the end of the world.”

The second usage serves as an “instrument” by which men can be convinced not only of their “sin” and “misery” but also of “God’s awful and tremendous majesty and justice as a lawgiver.” Through the covenant, men come to be “sensible of the necessity of Christ” as a redeemer. Thus, the covenant of works in its newest form could apply to both the Jewish nation in the OT and God’s church throughout the whole history of redemption. In other words, the covenant of works is in progress until the history of redemption is completed at the end of the world. This shows how the covenant of works serves as a means to realize the culmination of the history of redemption.

2. Typology fleshing out the historical aspect in Edwards’s federal theology. Moreover, the history of redemption is present in Edwards’s use of typology, in which he not only emphasizes the redemptive message of Scripture but also reveals the historical aspects in the federal schema. Typology has been regarded as “an integral element in Reformed covenant theology.” This is also true for Edwards’s federal theology, in which typology reveals the federal schema in terms of the fulfillment of redemptive history.

Edwards’s view of typology is based on a principle in which the OT and NT are harmonized with one another in history. This is shown in his plan of “a great work,” which he calls “a History of the Work of Redemption.” In the work, he intends to present that “every divine doctrine will appear … in the brightest light … showing the admirable contexture and harmony of the whole.” This indicates that Edwards understands the harmony of the OT and the NT in terms of the history of redemption. Thus, it is not surprising that after describing the nature of “a History of the Work of Redemption,” he starts to explain “another great work” called “the Harmony of the Old and New Testaments.”

Given Edwards’s emphasis on soteriological topics of the Bible, it is not difficult to find that typology for Edwards is concentrated on the Christocentric message. “The Types of the Old Testament,” Edwards states, are “intended as representations of the great things of the gospel of Christ.” Edwards articulates that “things before the fall” were meant to be “types of things pertaining to Christ’s redemption.” For example, Adam was “the figure of Christ.” Joseph is a type of both “God’s church in Israel” and “Christ.” Abel is typified as “a type of the true

81 Ibid.
82 Ibid.
83 Karlberg, Federalism and the Westminster Tradition, 3.
85 Ibid.
86 Ibid.
87 Ibid.
89 Ibid.
90 Ibid., 512.
church.” Furthermore, “Pharaoh’s delivering to Joseph the government of Egypt” typifies “the investiture of Jesus Christ, Mediator, with the government of the church and world.” As a result, typology for Edwards sheds light on how Christ’s redemptive works have been coming true in history.

In this vein, typology for Edwards can also be understood not simply spiritually, but historically. For example, Edwards identifies “the Jewish church” in the OT with “the Christian church” in Christ essentially, because both have the same subject: “Christ and his redemption.” When viewed in this light, the relationship between the “infant church” in Israel and the Christian church indicates continuity in the history of redemption.

This is apparent in Edwards’s view of the consummation of the work of redemption. He argues that the completion of the work of redemption will be at the end of history by Christ who is the antitype of Adam. Edwards goes on to say that although Adam was “the figure of Christ,” the gift received by Christ is not confined to the degree of “the damage received by Adam’s fall.” This means that the state of the completion of Christ’s redemptive works will far surpass the gift lost by Adam.

This is also seen in Edwards’s interpretation of Josh 24:2 in “Miscellanies,” no. 852, which deals with the corruption of Terah who served other gods in Chaldea. The sins of Terah and “the corruption of the church Israel in Egypt” signifies “the corruption of God’s people in the first times of Antichrist.” Edwards contends that “Chaldea and Egypt are types of the Romish Church.” He compares Terah, the Israel church, and “God’s people in the first times of Antichrist” to “the true church,” while he applies Chaldea and Egypt to the Roman Catholic church as antichrist.

The interpretation that Chaldea and Egypt typify the Roman Catholic church, in “Miscellanies,” no. 852, is based on Edwards’s interpretive principle that biblical texts can contain multiple meanings. In “Miscellanies,” no. 851, Edwards argues that multiple meanings of biblical texts are possible, due to God’s foreknowledge by which God “knows how to adapt his words to many things.” It follows from this consideration that the Roman Catholic Church could be a type of antichrist because of God’s foreknowledge before the world, which later came to be revealed in history.

We have seen Edwards’s exegetical explication of the federal schema is described in terms of the realization of the history of redemption. Moreover, Edwards’s view of typology demonstrates that he believes a covenant (and revelation)

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91 Ibid., 140–41.
94 Ibid.
98 Ibid., 80.
in the OT is realized in time through the process of the history of redemption. Given this, it becomes clear that Edwards’s biblical exegesis reveals the federal schema in terms of the fulfillment of redemptive history.

V. CONCLUSION

Recent study of Edwards’s view of federal theology by van der Knijff and van Vlastuin points to his increasing interest in the historical aspects of the covenants, especially the covenant of grace. However, van der Knijff and van Vlastuin do not offer concrete evidence of how these covenants became historicized in time in Edwards’s understanding. Addressing the question of the interrelationship of the covenant of redemption, the covenant of works, and the covenant of grace, this essay has focused on how Edwards’s federal theology relates to his biblical exegesis in terms of the history of redemption. We have found that the concept of conditionality reveals historical characteristics that help distinguish between the covenants. The covenant of redemption is different from the covenant of grace in that the latter became a covenant at a moment in time during the history of redemption. The covenant of works differs from the covenant of grace in that the conditionality of the covenant of works plays an important role in both Christ’s fulfilling the works of redemption and judging humanity at the end of the world. Thus, Edwards’s view of conditionality reveals that he considers it necessary for a covenant to be realized in the course of the history of redemption.

The essay, then, has proved that Edwards’s federal schema emerges from the texts of Scripture through Edwards’s biblical exegesis, which is based on the Reformed exegetical tradition. It appears that Edwards’s use of canonicity in interpreting the texts of Scripture is the same as the Protestant exegetical tradition with respect to both the analogy of Scripture (canonicity) and the analogy of faith by which difficult texts are understood. It is nonetheless noteworthy that Edwards’s view of the federal schema comes from his own consideration and examination of the texts of Scripture. Edwards thereby draws out the federal schema from numerous texts of Scripture through exegesis, focusing on how the covenants began and unfolded as a part God’s plan of redemptive history.

Considering the relationship between Edwards’s federal schema and his exegesis, it should be noted that Edwards understands the covenants of redemption, works, and grace in terms of the history of redemption. Edwards not only recognizes two dispensations of the covenant of grace in the OT and NT, but also even regards the covenant of works after the fall of Adam as a new exhibition of the covenant. Given this, both the covenant of grace and the covenant of works reveal their gradual historical aspect. Although the new covenant of grace was accomplished by Christ’s works of redemption, its perfect fruit waits to be revealed at the end of the world. Likewise, the new exhibition of the covenant of works was not only supposed to be fulfilled by Christ’s redemptive works but is also regarded as “schoolmaster” and “a rule of judgment” for all humanity through the whole history of redemption right up to the end of the world. Moreover, Edwards’s use of typology indicates that he relates the various texts of the Bible to the history of
redemption. Not only does the subject “Christ and his redemption” play a fundamental role in Edwards’s use of typology, but it also aided his interpretation of Scriptural texts—in terms of the process of the realization of covenants in the history of redemption.

Edwards’s federal schema stands with the central soteriological topics in his theology. He believes the promises in the covenant of redemption were revealed to God’s people in the covenant of grace and were accomplished by Christ’s fulfillment of the covenant of works. Moreover, the full effect of Christ’s work of redemption will be wholly revealed through the entire history of redemption which culminates at the end of the world. This implies that Edwards’s exegetical view of federal theology concentrates on the historical aspects in which he emphasizes redemptive history. Therefore, it appears that Edwards’s biblical exegesis reveals the interconnectedness between the federal schema and the history of redemption by emphasizing the historical accomplishment of the covenant of redemption through the covenants of works and grace.