Much has been written in the last few decades concerning the reassessment or reappraisal of seventeenth-century Reformed orthodoxy. Older scholarship viewed the Seventeenth Century as a period of downward movement, increasingly tending toward rationalism and proof-texting, driven by a central-dogma (i.e., the decree of predestination), highly Aristotelian (in the worst sense), and a drifting away from the supposedly more biblical, Christocentric methodology of the sixteenth-century Reformers. For instance, while tracing the history of New Testament Theology, George Eldon Ladd says:

The gains in the historical study of the Bible made by the reformers were soon lost in the post-Reformation period, and the Bible was once again used uncritically and unhistorically to support orthodox doctrine. The Bible was viewed not only as a book free from error and contradiction but also without development or progress. The entire Bible was looked upon as possessing one level of theological value. History was completely lost in dogma, and philology became a branch of dogmatics.

Alister E. McGrath, a contemporary historical theologian, also adheres to this older position. In a chapter entitled, “Protestant Orthodoxy,” McGrath paints this dismal picture:

It seems to be a general feature of the history of Christian thought, that a period of genuine creativity is immediately followed by a petrification and scholasticism, as the insights of a pioneering thinker or group of thinkers are embodied in formulae or confessions. (The term \textit{Confession} is particularly applied to Protestant professions of faith of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, such as the Augsburg Confession (1530)). For many critics of Orthodoxy,
particularly within Pietistic circles, Orthodoxy merely guarded the ashes of the Reformation, rather than tending its flame. The period of Orthodoxy between the first phase of the Reformation and the Enlightenment is characterized by its confessionalism, which effectively replaced the dynamism of the first phase of the Reformation with a static understanding of the nature of theology. It was this tendency which Alexander Schweizer (1808-88) criticized in his famous remark: ‘Once the fathers confessed their faith—today most Christians just believe their confessions’.4

Another scholar who adheres to this view is Charles S. McCoy, who says of the Reformed scholastics, “Starting with the Eternal Decree of predestination, the Reformed scholastics deduced their theological systems.”5

This view has been vigorously and critically reassessed. The conclusions stemming from this reassessment (which we will note below), in the mind of this researcher, are cogent and compelling because much better-researched. They rely on primary source documents, not anachronistic revisionism. We agree with Richard A. Muller, “we are dealing here with a ‘modern aversion to scholasticism’ rather than with a balanced historical assessment.”6 The more recent research takes into consideration the broader issues of the various levels of context which must be understood before interpreting historical documents. These levels of context include the educational background of each author, the educational curriculum of the schools and universities, and the impact of the Renaissance and Reformation upon the scholastic method. 7 For these reasons, we agree with the validity of these conclusions and will work within their historical-interpretive model. But what does this reassessment involve and what are its conclusions? To this we now turn our attention.

The Reassessment8 of Protestant Scholasticism: The “Muller”9 Thesis

1. Introduction: “Old” and “New” School Views of Protestant Scholasticism

This reassessment claims that older scholarship was simply wrong on several counts (see below) and that not only was there a large degree of theological continuity between the sixteenth- and seventeen-century Reformed (and Lutheran) theologians, but there also was a degree of methodological discontinuity10 and, though complex,11 healthy development as well. Following

2 Alister E. McGrath, “Protestant Orthodoxy” in Gillian R. Evans, Alister E. McGrath, and Allan D. Galloway, editors, The Science of Theology (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1986), 151. Absent from McGrath’s discussion of Protestant orthodoxy is a meaningful level of discussion of and interaction with primary sources. Even when he refers to a primary source, it is not properly referenced; it’s merely quoted as proof with no bibliographic information. The “For Further Reading” list at the end of the chapter, interestingly enough, contains the titles of mostly secondary sources. The one apparent exception is Heppe’s Reformed Dogmatics, but even that is merely a collection of various writings of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century authors and tainted with Heppe’s faulty view of Beza (cf. van Asselt and Dekker, “Introduction” in van Asselt and Eef Dekker, editors, Reformation and Scholasticism, 17-18). McGrath gives the appearance of rehashing the pronouncements of secondary sources and using primary sources in a simplistic, proof-texting fashion. Commenting on McGrath’s essay, Muller, PRRD, I:45, n. 24, says, “…it appears to rest entirely on secondary sources.” The same view of Protestant Scholasticism can be seen in McGrath’s Reformation Thought, 129-131.


4 Muller, “Calvin and the “Calvinists””, II:149.

5 Muller, “Calvin and the “Calvinists””, II:159.

6 For a brief justification for reassessment, see Carl R. Trueman and R. Scott Clark, “Introduction” in Trueman and Clark, editors, Protestant Scholasticism, xi-iii.


8 Muller, PRRD, I:46; Muller, “Calvin and the “Calvinists””, I:366.
Richard A. Muller, a new breed of scholars has emerged seeking to correct decades of bad press hurled at Protestant scholasticism from various fronts. Whereas the older scholarship accused Protestant scholasticism of blind commitment to Aristotelianism, a presupposed central-dogma (i.e., the decree of predestination), and careless proof-texting, the newer scholarship has gone *ad fontes* and has viewed them in light of their historical, theological, philosophical, and cultural contexts. The more recent scholarship has come away with a very different, positive reading. Martin I. Klauber reduces Muller’s thesis to the following:

He argues that although the theologians of the post-Reformation period used a scholastic methodology to clarify the Reformed theological system they remain in essential agreement with the first generation of Reformed thought in content.

The connection with the past, according to Muller and his comrades, actually goes farther back than the Reformers. Just as the Reformers were connected methodologically and theologically with what preceded them, though not monolithically, so also with the post-Reformation scholastics. In fact, Muller’s thesis is actually the fruit of the previous studies of contemporary Reformation scholars applied to the post-Reformation scholastic era. Trueman and Clark acknowledge this, when they say:

[Muller] has extended and applied to the field of Reformed orthodoxy the insights scholars such as [David C.] Steinmetz and [Heiko A.] Oberman have brought to Reformation studies. He has thus refused to judge orthodoxy by anachronistic criteria or by the theology of one or two randomly selected individuals, and has emphasized the importance of understanding Reformed theology as part of an ongoing Western tradition which extends back through the Middle Ages to the early church. The theologies of the Reformation and the post-Reformation era are neither wholly continuous nor wholly discontinuous with the past – they are, rather, changes in direction within the wider Augustinian, anti-Pelagian tradition of Western theology. As such the era of orthodoxy must not be set over against its past but must be studied in the context of its medieval and Reformation roots.

One branch of the older position is labeled the discontinuity theory by van Asselt and Dekker in their introduction to *Reformation and Scholasticism*. This theory claims that “scholastic orthodoxy [is] a fatal deviation from the Reformation.” Muller describes this theory as advocating that Reformed orthodoxy was “an undifferentiated, doctrinaire, Aristotelian, metaphysical monolith at odds with the heritage of the Reformation.” A slavish dependency upon Aristotelianism, among other things, is a hallmark of this older theory. W.G.T. Shedd, for instance, claims, “In Baxter and Owen, both of whom were also very diligent students of the Schoolmen, we perceive more of the influence of the Aristotelian system.” Shedd adds, “This

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12 Cf. especially Trueman and Clark, editors, *Protestant Scholasticism*, van Asselt and Eef Dekker, editors, *Reformation and Scholasticism*, and Muller, *PRRD*.
16 van Asselt and Dekker, “Introduction” in *Reformation and Scholasticism*, 29. Cf. the words of Ladd and McGrath above.
body of divinity [i.e., English theology of the Seventeenth Century], which without question is
the most profound that the English mind has originated, owes its systematic form and structure to
the Grecian intellectual methods.”

Alister McGrath, as stated above, represents the assessment of the older scholarship. Muller
quotes him:

The starting point of theology thus came to be general principles, not a specific historic event. The
contrast with Calvin will be clear… Calvin focused on the specific historical phenomenon of Jesus
Christ and moved out to explore its implications… By contrast, Beza began from general
principles and proceeded to deduce their consequences for Christian theology.

Muller then points his readers to several recent studies of Beza which have proven McGrath’s
claims as unfounded.21 Carl Trueman adds:

It is perhaps ironic that one of the principle pieces of evidence used by advocates of the ‘Calvin
against the Calvinist’ thesis are Beza’s Tabula Praedestinationis and Perkin’s [sic] adaptation of
this in A Golden Chaine. These are cited as examples of how predestination comes to dominate
Reformed theology and reflect its nature as a predestinarian deductive system. However, as Barth
so clearly understood, the tables were intended to be read from the bottom up rather than the top
down, and so they are anything but deductive; further, and more important for this section,
Perkins’s [sic] addition of a central column to Beza’s much sparser original, a column which
outlines the work of Christ and connecting the history of Christ to the order of salvation, clearly
indicates the concern of the Reformed Orthodox to do justice to Christology and historical
narrative flow in their formulation of salvation. What they refuse to do is to abandon either
ontology or economy for the sake of the other.22

A form of the discontinuity theory is seen in what may be called the “decretal theology”
theory, or as Muller puts it, “abstract decreetalism.”23 It asserts that Reformed theology went from
Calvin (and Christ) through Beza to predestination and the decree of God as the starting point
of theology from which all else is deduced. In other words, Reformed theology went from a
Christocentric (viewed positively) to a theocentric (viewed negatively) starting point. Or as
McGrath puts it:

Calvin’s approach appears to be analytic and inductive – i.e., proceeding from the concrete event
of redemption in Christ to an exploration of its implications (such as predestination and election) –
and is thus able to remain profoundly Christocentric: Orthodoxy, by contrast, took its starting
point in the intratrinitarian decision to redeem or damn – and thus assumed a strongly theocentric

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20 Muller, “The Problem of Protestant Scholasticism – A Review and Definition” in Reformation and
Scholasticism, 46. Muller is quoting McGrath from Reformation Thought, 129-130. Muller claims that “the definition
derives, without citation but with clear verbal reliance, from Brian G. Armstrong, Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy:
Protestant Scholasticism and Humanism in Seventeenth Century France (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press,
1969), 32.” In Muller, “The Problem of Protestant Scholasticism – A Review and Definition” in Reformation and
Scholasticism, 46, n. 3, he says of McGrath, “The form taken in Alister McGrath’s Reformation Thought is illustrative
of his immersion … in twenty-five year old secondary sources…”
21 Muller, “The Problem of Protestant Scholasticism – A Review and Definition” in Reformation and
Scholasticism, 47, n. 5.
22 Trueman, John Owen, 87, n. 76. At the end of the footnote Trueman adds, “For Barth’s views, see CD 2.2, 78;
contrast this with the misreading of the Perkins’ table offered by James B Torrance, ‘Strengths and Weaknesses of the
Westminster Theology’ in Alasdair I C Heron, The Westminster Confession in the Church Today (Edinburgh: St
Andrew Press, 1982), 40—54.”
cast…. The fact that predestination is the central dogma of Reformed Orthodoxy thus reflects the theological method employed by the theologians of that school.24

Muller confronts the decretal theology theory, among other places,25 in his “The Myth of ‘Decretal Theology’” referenced above.26 In section two of that article, “Peeling the Historical Onion,” Muller peels the layers of the historical onion of decretal theology and denies the validity of each. His assertions are as follows: “Predestination is not the starting point of the system.”27 “The Reformed system is biblical and historical, not purely deductive.”28 “Later Reformed theology did not distort the heritage of the Reformation.”29 “Christ is not reduced to a mere means to God’s end.”30 “The assertion of salvation by grace alone ought not to be seen as a problem.”31 The use of the Aristotelian causality model (i.e., efficient cause, formal cause, material cause, and final cause) “is a purely heuristic device, a form of explanation intended not to indicate any sort of determinism.”32 “The eternal decree does not, therefore, abolish history – it makes history possible.”33 “The older Reformed theology did not ignore the work of God in history.”34 “The distinction between the eternal decree and its execution is just that: a distinction, not a disjunction or a separation.”35 “The decree does not remove free choice, responsibility, and incentive. It makes them possible.”36

What many scholars are concluding is that “…Protestant scholasticism was an institutional theology, confessionally in continuity with the insights of the Reformers and doctrinally in continuity with the Christian tradition as a whole.”37 In Muller’s words:

The contribution of the orthodox or scholastic theologians to the history of Protestantism, then, was the creation of an institutional theology, confessionally in continuity with the Reformation and doctrinally, in the sense of the larger system of doctrine, in continuity with the great tradition of the church.38

24 McGrath, “Protestant Orthodoxy” in The Science of Theology, 158.
26 This article is not a technical defense of Muller’s thesis. It occurs in the “Scholia: Notes and Comments for the Minister” section of CTJ and, therefore, does not intend to be a thoroughly argued and documented defense of the thesis. The article, however, does reflect the conclusions of the thesis and assumes its historical-theological research and analysis.
27 Muller, “The Myth of “Decretal Theology”,” 162. For an example of one who views scholasticism as a theology deduced from predestination, cf. McCoy, “Johannes Cocceius: Federal Theologian” in SJT 16 (1963): 360, where he says, “Whereas the scholastic system is based upon deduction from the doctrine of predestination, however, the teaching which Cocceius sets forth is given structure by the concept of the covenant between God and man and is developed by exegesis.”
33 Muller, “The Myth of “Decretal Theology”,” 165.
34 Muller, “The Myth of “Decretal Theology”,” 165. As we will see, the Federal Theology of the seventeenth century clearly did not ignore God’s work in history. This will be especially clear in Owen’s BTO.
37 Willem J. van Asselt, “Cocceius Anti-Scholasticius?” in van Asselt and Eef Dekker, editors, Reformation and Scholasticism, 231.
38 Muller, PRRD, 1:28; cf. Richard A. Muller, “Sources of Reformed Orthodoxy: The Symmetrical Unity of Exegesis and Synthesis” in Michael S. Horton, editor, A Confessing Theology for Postmodern Times (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000), 52, where he says, “…in the tradition of the Reformers, these successor theologians took the catholicity of Protestantism seriously, claimed for themselves and their churches the best of the Christian tradition, and appropriated it critically, for the clarification and for the defense of the faith.”
After examining the sources of Reformed orthodox theology, Muller concludes elsewhere:

An examination of the sources of Reformed orthodoxy (and, we might add, of Protestant orthodoxy in general) easily and clearly sets aside the stereotypes of this theology. At the very least, the standard claims about central dogmas, legalism, rationalism and proof-texting biblicism fail because they are simplistic. How simple and, indeed, simple-minded it would be to deduce a theology from one principle, and by contrast, how complex it in fact is to construct that theology out of exegetical arguments nuanced by extensive knowledge of the biblical and cognate languages, attention to the exegetical tradition and acknowledgment of the significance of creeds, confessions and the wealth of the tradition. How equally simple it would be to give one’s theology over to an “ism”—whether legalism, rationalism or Aristotelianism; and by contrast how complex it is in fact to balance out a wide variety of issues, sub-themes and ancillary sources, to develop a critical perspective on the philosophical tradition that modifies it at crucial points, and to retain the rationality of exposition without ever allowing reason to have principal status. Would that the modern theologies that criticize this older orthodoxy were able to match its expertise in the many theological disciplines! Would that they were able to understand (and master) as clearly and well the hierarchy of sources, with Scripture as ultimate norm, followed by ecumenical creeds, churchly confessions, the wealth of the tradition, and the various ancillary disciplines in a descending order of authority!  

Van Asselt and Dekker offer 10 characteristics of the newer type of research on Protestant scholasticism:

1. Scholasticism is a scientific method of research and teaching, and does as such not have a doctrinal content, neither does it have reason as its foundation.
2. There is a continuity between the Medieval, Reformation and Post-reformation Era (which is of course, not to deny that there are many differences).
3. “Aristotelianism” is exceedingly problematic when applied with a broad brush, and should rather be avoided if used unspecified.
4. Syllogisms are used by any person in a reasoning process (but not always consciously and explicitly), and are therefore, in themselves, not a sign of anything beyond that reasoning process, let alone of Aristotelianism.
5. The scornful way in which Luther and Calvin treated scholasticism is not to be taken as an overall hermeneutical principle to read scholasticism.
6. Let the scholastics themselves define scholasticism.
7. Protestant scholasticism does not proceed by abstracting proof texts out of Scripture, nor does Medieval scholasticism avoid or neglect Scripture and scriptural language.
8. Christian faith, and therefore, Christian theology, has its own view of life, its own frame of thought and is not to be identified with any philosophical system.
9. Parts of that unique Christian frame of thought are the contents of will and contingency.
10. The relative placement of a locus in a system of doctrine does not as such change its content.  

2. Scholasticism Defined
Scholasticism refers to an academic style and method of discourse or even “a form of scientific practice” and not a theology or a particular philosophical school. Muller, while describing Protestant scholasticism, says:

39 Muller, “Sources of Reformed Orthodoxy,” 57.
41 Muller, PRRD, I:30; van Asselt and Dekker, “Introduction,” 13-14; and Trueman and Clark, “Introduction,” xiv-xv.
Scholasticism is a methodological approach to theological system which achieves precision of definition through analysis of doctrinal *loci* in terms of scripture, previous definition (the tradition), and contemporary debate.43

The work of these theologians is well described by the two terms “scholastic” and “orthodox.” The former term refers primarily to method, the latter, primarily to dogmatic or doctrinal intention. In the late sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, both Reformed and Lutheran theologians adopted a highly technical and logical approach to theological system, according to which each theological topic or *locus* was divided into its component parts, the parts analyzed and then defined in careful propositional form. In addition, this highly technical approach sought to achieve precise definition by debate with adversaries and by use of the Christian tradition as a whole in arguing its doctrines. The form of theological system was adapted to a didactical and polemical model that could move from biblical definition to traditional development of doctrine, to debate with doctrinal adversaries past and present, to theological resolution of the problem. This method is rightly called scholastic both in view of its roots in medieval scholasticism and in view of its intention to provide an adequate technical theology for schools—seminaries and universities. The goal of this method, the dogmatic or doctrinal intention of this theology, was to provide the church with “right teaching,” literally, “orthodoxy.”44

“[Scholastic] well describes the technical and academic side of this process of the institutionalization and professionalization of Protestant doctrine in the universities of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.”45 It is important to remember that the scholasticism utilized by the Protestants was “influenced by both the Renaissance and the Reformation” and was practiced in “a context not at all identical with that of medieval scholasticism.”46 Scholasticism is not a philosophy or a theology; it is a method of discourse utilized by theologians and philosophers for several centuries.

3. Orthodoxy Defined
Orthodox refers to those Protestant theologians who stood within the confessional framework of the Reformed churches and which [are] understood as conveying the “right teaching” of those churches, whether scholastic, catechetical, exegetical, or homiletical, as determined by the standards of the era. “Orthodox,” in other words, functions as a historical denominator – and reference to the era of orthodoxy indicates the time of the institutionalization of the Reformation according to its confessional norms, namely the era extending roughly from the latter part of the sixteenth through the early eighteenth centuries.47

Trueman defines Reformed orthodoxy as:

the tradition of Protestant thought which found its creedal expression on the continent in such documents as, among others, the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dordt, and in Britain in the Westminster Assembly’s Confession of Faith and Larger and Shorter Catechisms.48

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45 Muller, *PRRD*, 1:30, 35.
46 Muller, *PRRD*, 1:30, 33-34; cf. also Muller, *Dictionary*, 8; Muller, *Christ and the Decree*, 12; and van Asselt and Dekker, “Introduction,” 13.
47 Muller, *PRRD*, 1:30, 33-34; cf. also Muller, *Dictionary*, 8; Muller, *Christ and the Decree*, 12; and van Asselt and Dekker, “Introduction,” 13.
Reformed orthodoxy is, then, one link in the chain “of the wider ongoing Western tradition of theological and philosophical thought.”

4. Conclusion
The validity of this reassessment is gaining ground as more monographs, dissertations, and journal articles are published which examine seventeenth-century Reformed orthodoxy in its various contexts from primary sources. Scholars are concluding (and I think correctly) that Reformed orthodoxy was not a defection from the theology of the sixteenth-century Reformers. Reformed scholasticism was the continuance of a heuristic method (i.e., the scholastic method) utilized for centuries (Muller argues from the Twelfth through the Seventeenth, though not monolithically) with its own nuances, yet in harmony and general continuity with the wider, Western Christian theological tradition.

The Era of High Orthodoxy (ca. 1640-1685-1725)
This era of Reformed orthodoxy, according to Muller,

rests upon a confessional summation of the faith, has a somewhat sharper and more codified polemic against its doctrinal adversaries, and possesses a broader and more explicit grasp of the tradition, particularly of the contribution of the Middle Ages. Characteristic of the initial phase of this era are internal or intraconfessional controversies, such as the broader Amyraldian controversy and the debate over Cocceian federal theology as well as the vast expansion of debate with the Socinians over the doctrine of the Trinity. In this phase of the high orthodox period are found such authors as Johannes Cocceius, Samuel Maresius, Andreas Essenius, Gisbertus Voetius, Friedrich Spanheim the elder, Marcus Friedrich Wendelin, Franz Burman, Francis Turretin, Edward Leigh, Matthew Poole, John Owen, and Stephen Charnock.

John Owen, as indicated by Muller, fits within this era of Reformed orthodoxy. The literature on Owen shows that he fits not simply chronologically, but also methodologically and theologically.

The era of high orthodoxy witnessed “changes in the style of dogmatics.” Muller says:

The creativity of the high orthodox era was more in the way of nuance and elaboration – well illustrated in the development of covenant theology in the hands of Cocceius and his followers and in the detailed exposition of other trajectories in orthodoxy by such writers as Voetius, Turretin, and Mastricht.

Muller continues:

High orthodoxy, then, is the era of the full and final development of Protestant system prior to the great changes in philosophical and scientific perspective that would, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, utterly recast theological system into new forms.

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49 Trueman, John Owen, 6.
50 Muller, PRRD, 1:35, 37.
52 Muller, PRRD, 1:31.
53 Muller, PRRD, 1:31-32.
54 See the section below entitled “John Owen: Reformed Orthodox Theologian.”
55 Muller, PRRD, 1:73; Muller, Christ and the Decree, 13.
56 Muller, PRRD, 1:75; Muller, Christ and the Decree, 13.
57 Muller, PRRD, 1:80.
This era was characterized by polemical works aimed at Roman Catholicism, Arminianism, and Socinianism and was the high point of the systematic elaboration of Reformed theology prior to the onslaught of the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment critical era.\textsuperscript{58} According to Trueman, John Owen played a unique role in the high orthodox development of the doctrine of the covenant of redemption\textsuperscript{59} and, as will be argued in the main section of this dissertation, he also played a key role in the development of Federal Theology (specifically in casting it in a more redemptive historical/linear/historia salutis model).

The Theological Methodology of Reformed Orthodoxy

1. Introduction
We have noted that the method of the Reformed orthodox was scholastic. However, as also noted, it was not one and the same with medieval scholasticism, nor was it a form of post-Reformation Aristotelian rationalism. It was a “method of presentation”\textsuperscript{60} which utilized various weapons and was commonplace in the theological schools of the day.\textsuperscript{61} Muller comments on the Reformed scholastic method as follows:

The fundamental characteristic of the approach to theology found in the system of a Reformed scholastic like Francis Turretin is a movement from a basic doctrinal question to a statement of the “state” of the controversy, to a resolution of the debate using the authorities and tools at hand, with Scripture standing as the foremost authority, followed by tradition (principally the fathers of the first five centuries), classical, and philosophical sources, and supported by rational argumentation concerning the right understanding of the various authorities. Thus, the Reformed scholastics — beginning in the time of the Reformation itself in the scholastic aspects of the theologies of Vermigli, Musculus, and Hyperius — certainly sought to formulate a logically or rationally defensible body of doctrine, but they sought also to formulate a body of doctrine defensible in the light of the best exegetical results of the time and in the light of the catholic tradition to which they laid claim. Rational argumentation never displaced exegetical interest — indeed, the most scholastic of seventeenth-century Protestant theologians would assume that the defensibility of their theology was grounded in its intimate relationship with exegesis.\textsuperscript{62}

Muller’s assessment is fast becoming the assessment of many. The theological methodology of the Reformed orthodox was, in the first place, exegetical. In order to get a firmer grip on their methodology, we will examine it from the vantage point of what it is not—a hyper-syllogistic method, an Aristotelian, rationalistic method, a universal method—and what it is—a pre-critical method, an exegetically-based method, a redemptive-historically sensitive method, and a multi-sourced method. The last four mentioned methodological characteristics are especially visible in Owen’s writings.

2. Not a Hyper-Syllogistic Method
Their method was not reduced to syllogistic argumentation ad nauseam. In fact, Muller claims, “Few of the orthodox or scholastic Protestants lapsed into constant or exclusive recourse to syllogism as a method of exposition.”\textsuperscript{63} Syllogistic argumentation was utilized, but mostly in polemic contexts and not as an exegetical tool. Logic—the science of necessary inference—was utilized by the Reformed orthodox in the drawing out of good and necessary conclusions from the

\textsuperscript{58} Cf. Trueman, \textit{John Owen}, 7.
\textsuperscript{59} Cf. Trueman, \textit{John Owen}, 80-92 for a discussion of this.
\textsuperscript{60} Klauber, “An Evaluation of the Muller Thesis,” 471.
\textsuperscript{61} Muller, “Calvin and the “Calvinists”,” I:370.
\textsuperscript{62} Muller, “Calvin and the “Calvinists”,” I:368.
\textsuperscript{63} Muller, “Calvin and the “Calvinists”,” I:369.
text of Scripture, but it was a servant and not the lord of the interpreter. Muller says that “the drawing of logical conclusions appears as one of the final hermeneutical steps in the [Reformed orthodox exegetical] method.”

3. Not an Aristotelian, Rationalistic Method
The Protestant scholasticism of the post-Reformation era must be distinguished from rationalism. The Reformed orthodox did not place human reason above, or even equal to, divine revelation. The place and function of reason was subordinate to the authority of Scripture. Reason was an instrument, not an axiomatic principle. The Protestant scholastics utilized a modified (or Christian) Aristotelianism “that had its beginnings in the thirteenth century.” Muller explains:

It is important to recognize what this use entailed and what it did not. The Christian Aristotelianism of the Protestant orthodox drew on rules of logic and devices such as the fourfold causality in order to explain and develop their doctrinal formulae—and only seldom, if ever, to import a full-scale rational metaphysics or physics into their theology. Contrary to what is sometimes claimed, the fourfold causality (i.e., first, formal, material, and final causes) does not imply a particular metaphysic. Specifically, it is not by nature “deterministic.” One can use the model to delineate the soteriological patterns of the eternal decree of God and its execution in time; one can also use the model to describe the sources and effects of human sinfulness and human moral conduct; or one can use the model to explain how a carpenter makes a table. The large-scale result of Christian Aristotelianism was not, in other words, a fundamentally Aristotelian Christianity: Aristotle would have disowned this hybrid philosophy with its infinite God who created the world out of nothing! There was, certainly, less imposition of rational metaphysics on theology in the seventeenth-century orthodox affirmations of divine eternity, omniscience, and immutability than there is in the twentieth-century claims of a changing God whose very being is in flux and who lacks foreknowledge of future contingency.

Van Asselt says, “the facile equation of Scholasticism and Aristotelianism is no longer tenable.”

4. Not a Universal Method
Simply because an author utilized the scholastic method in some of his writings did not mean he used it in all of them. For instance, Muller offers Beza as an example. Elsewhere, Muller says, “In the cases of Perkins, Ames, Voetius, and Baxter, works of piety and works of scholastic theology emanated from the same pens.” Muller goes on to say:

There is no clear division between Protestant scholasticism and federal theology. Theologians who wrote works of piety that followed a “positive” or “catechetical” method also wrote more technical and academic works using the scholastic method—and many of the scholastic, as well as “positive” works were covenantal in their theology.

This observation applies to Johannes Cocceius and John Owen. As we shall see, Owen utilized the scholastic method in some treatises and a more practical, pastoral approach in others.

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64 Cf. Muller, _PRRD_, II:497-500 for a discussion of the use of logic in interpretation.
65 Muller, _PRRD_, II:501.
66 Cf. _Westminster Confession of Faith_ 1:10 for confessional embodiment to this conviction.
67 Muller, “Calvin and the "Calvinists",” 1:374.
68 Muller, “Sources of Reformed Orthodoxy,” 55. Cf. van Asselt, “The Fundamental Meaning of Theology,” 322, where he says that the Reformed theology of the late sixteenth century (i.e., Franciscus Junius) critically received the Christian tradition.
69 Muller, “Sources of Reformed Orthodoxy,” 55.
71 Muller, “Calvin and the "Calvinists,"” 1:370.
72 Muller, “Calvin and the "Calvinists,"” II:145.
73 Muller, “Calvin and the “Calvinists”,” II:146.
Both Cocceius and Owen also utilized the federal model as well as the loci model at times. Also, within the body of Owen’s *BTO*, he uses the scholastic method but also ridicules it. This obviously shows that Owen could use a method he fully realized was abused by others and that the scholastic method was just that—a methodology and not a theology.

5. A Pre-Critical Method
The Reformed orthodox obviously predate the Enlightenment and the critical assault on the Holy Scriptures. The Enlightenment gave birth to, among other things, a rationalistic approach to the interpretation of Scripture. This can be seen, for instance, in the early developments of Biblical Theology, as noted above. Typical Enlightenment rationalism and anti-supernaturalism is evidenced in the following statements made by Benjamin Jowett, a Greek professor at Oxford in the mid-Nineteenth Century. David C. Steinmetz quotes Jowett and comments:

Jowett argued that “Scripture has one meaning—the meaning which it had in the mind of the Prophet or Evangelist who first uttered or wrote, to the hearers or readers who first received it.”

Scripture should be interpreted like any other book and the later accretions and venerated traditions surrounding its interpretation should, for the most part, either be brushed aside or severely discounted. “The true use of interpretation is to get rid of interpretation, and leave us alone in company with the author.”

Jowett obviously reduces meaning to the intent of the human author alone. In critical hermeneutical theory, there was no room whatsoever for the medieval concept of “double literal sense” or for the Reformation and post-Reformation concepts of *sensus literalis* (literal sense), *analogia Scripturae* (analogy of Scripture), *analogia fidei* (analogy of faith), and *scopus Scripturae* (scope of Scripture). In post-modern thought, man, the reader, is king of interpretation; in the modern/Enlightenment theory man, the author, was. In the Middle Ages, however, and in the Reformation and post-Reformation eras, though through differing hermeneutical principles, the meaning of Scripture was not determined by the human author’s intent alone or the reader. Ultimately, the meaning of Scripture was determined by God, the author of Scripture.

6. An Exegetically-Based Method
Though the Reformed orthodox were confessionally one in a historical sense (*i.e.*, the *Belgic Confession*, the *Heidelberg Catechism*, the *Canons of Dort*, the Westminster Assembly’s *Confession of Faith and Larger and Shorter Catechisms*), this did not mean that they viewed the exegetical task as complete and, therefore, unnecessary, nor that there was no room for disagreement over the exegesis of individual texts. Muller comments:

the biblicism of the seventeenth-century orthodox must not be read as an era of dogmatizing exegesis devoid of careful textual analysis and devoid of any variety in interpretation among those

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78 We will discuss these below.
79 This, of course, does not imply that pre-critical exegesis always arrived at God’s meaning of the text. We will tease this out below. Cf. Packer, *Quest for Godliness*, 98, for a brief discussion of the Puritans as pre-modern exegetes.
of an orthodox confessional persuasion. Instead, the age ought to be viewed as the great age of Protestant linguistic study and Judaica, of the textual analysis that led to such monumental productions as the London Polyglot Bible. ...the Protestant orthodoxy must be recognized as producing highly varied and diverse exegetical works and commentaries, ranging from text-critical essays, to textual annotations, theological annotations, linguistic commentaries based on the study of cognate languages and Judaica, doctrinal and homiletical commentaries, and, indeed, all manner of permutations and combinations of these several types of effort.\textsuperscript{81}

Biblical exegesis, in fact, experienced a revival of sorts among the Reformed orthodox of the Seventeenth Century. Muller says:

Contrary to much of the “received wisdom” concerning the seventeenth century, the era of orthodoxy was a time of great exegetical, textual, and linguistic development in Protestantism—and, indeed, it was the orthodox exegetes who were responsible for the major monuments to biblical scholarship.\textsuperscript{82}

Trueman says, “the seventeenth century witnessed a remarkable flourishing of linguistic and exegetical studies, driven by both the positive and the polemical exigencies of Protestantism’s commitment to scripture, in the original languages, as being the very Word – and words – of God.”\textsuperscript{83} Trueman continues elsewhere:

A high view of the authority and integrity of the biblical text as God’s word written was [a] major factor in fuelling the development of careful attention both to the biblical languages and other cognate tongues, and to issues of textual history and criticism. The idea that the seventeenth-century Reformed were interested neither in careful exegesis nor in the literary and linguistic contexts of the Bible is simply untrue. Indeed, the linguistic and exegetical work of this century was far more elaborate than that which had marked the earlier Reformation. ...the exegesis of the Reformed Orthodox is far from the dogmatically-driven Procrusteanism of popular mythology.\textsuperscript{84}

7. A Redemptive-Historically Sensitive Method
Not only were the Reformed orthodox exegetically driven, their hermeneutic was a whole-Bible hermeneutic, evidenced in such concepts as their highly nuanced view of \textit{sensus literalis} (literal sense), \textit{analogia Scripturae} (analogy of Scripture), \textit{analogia fidei} (analogy of faith), and \textit{scopus Scripturae} (scope of Scripture).\textsuperscript{85} It is of vital importance to understand the nuances involved with these concepts in order to properly understand the Reformed orthodox and John Owen, in particular.

\textit{Sensus literalis} was a complex idea for the Reformed orthodox. It is defined by Muller as follows:

The fundamental literal or grammatical sense of the text of Scripture, distinguished into (1) \textit{sensus literalis simplex}, the simple literal sense, which lies immediately in the grammar and the meaning of the individual words, and (2) \textit{sensus literalis compositus}, the constructed or compound literal sense, which is inferred from the Scripture as a whole or from individual clear, and therefore normative, passages of Scripture when the simple literal sense of the text in question seems to

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{81} Muller, “Calvin and the “Calvinists”,” II:132-133.  
\textsuperscript{82} Muller, “Sources of Reformed Orthodoxy,” 46.  
\textsuperscript{83} Trueman, \textit{John Owen}, 8-9.  
\textsuperscript{84} Trueman, \textit{John Owen}, 37; Cf. Muller, \textit{PRRD}, II:482ff. for a fascinating discussion of the practice of exegesis among the Reformed orthodox.  
violate either the *articuli fidei* [articles of faith or Christian doctrine]... or the *praecepta caritatis* [precepts of love or Christian ethics]... 86

This definition is important historically for at least two reasons: (1) it was an implicit denial of the medieval *quadriga* (i.e., fourfold pattern of meaning: literal or historical, tropological or moral, allegorical or doctrinal, and anagogical or ultimate/eschatological); and (2) it was a safeguard against the rationalistic hyper-literalism of Socinianism, which was used to deny crucial elements of the historic, Western Christian doctrine of God. The *quadriga* was a hermeneutical paradigm utilized since the time of John Cassian that was replaced by the Reformers and especially the post-Reformation Reformed orthodox with a simpler, though still complex, approach. Though they argued that each text had one, literal sense, they also saw “several levels of meaning” or “diverse senses” which belonged “to the single intention of the Spirit.” If the words of the text cannot stand on their own without contradicting some clear teaching of Scripture, then the intent of the author (ultimately God) was to go beyond the words themselves either by a figure of speech, typology, or prophecy. Either way, the sense is one—that is, the true meaning is that intended by the author, who is God. Each text has but one meaning, the meaning intended by God, and that one meaning is conveyed either through the words of the text properly or in themselves (i.e., grammatically) or through the words of the text improperly or in what they signify (i.e., spiritually, figuratively, typologically). Divine authorial intent never changes. What God revealed, for instance, in Hosea 11:1, always had a near-historical and a far-eschatological/Christological meaning (Matthew 2:15), though not necessarily understood as such by Hosea or his audience. Muller quotes Aquinas at this point favorably: “the literal sense is that which the author intends, and the author of Scripture is God.”

*Analogia Scripturae*, as defined by Muller, involves “the interpretation of unclear, difficult, or ambiguous passages of Scripture by comparison with clear and unambiguous passages that refer to the same teaching or event.”

*Analogia fidei*, however, is broader than *analogia Scripturae*. It refers to

the use of a general sense of the meaning of Scripture, constructed from the clear or unambiguous loci..., as the basis for interpreting unclear or ambiguous texts. As distinct from the more basic *analogia Scripturae...*, the *analogia fidei* presupposes a sense of the theological meaning of Scripture.

Both of these interpretive tools (and the *senses literalis*) presuppose “the canonical character of the whole of Scripture and the assumption that the canon, as such, was inspired and the infallible rule of faith.”

This “whole-Bible” hermeneutic was also manifested in their understanding of the *scopus* of Scripture (i.e., *scopus Scripturae*). Though *scopus* could refer to the immediate pericope, it also

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86 Muller, *Dictionary*, 279. Muller discusses the literal sense in depth in *PRRD*, II:469-482.
89 Muller, *PRRD*, II:474.
90 Muller, *PRRD*, II:475.
91 Muller, *PRRD*, II:474.
92 Muller, *PRRD*, II:474.
94 Muller, *PRRD*, II:476; Muller is quoting Aquinas, *Summa theologicae*, Ia, q. 1, a. 10.
97 Muller, *PRRD*, II:474, 492.
had a wider, redemptive-historical focus. *Scopus*, in this latter sense, referred to the center or target of the entirety of canonical revelation; it is that to which the entire Bible points. For the Reformers and for the seventeenth-century Reformed orthodox, Christ was the *scopus* of Scripture.

The *First Helvetic Confession* of 1536 gave early Reformed expression to this concept in Article V, entitled “The Scope of Scripture.” The first sentence of that article reads as follows:

> The position of this entire canonical scripture [or of the entire actual canonical scripture] is this, that God is kindhearted [or shows kindness] to the race of men, and that he has proclaimed [or demonstrated] this kindness [or goodwill] through Christ his Son.

William Ames says, “The Old and New Testaments are reducible to these two primary heads. The Old promises Christ to come and the New testifies that he has come.” Kelly M. Kapic says of John Owen:

For Owen, all Scripture points to Christ, for “the revelation of the person of Christ and his office, is the foundation whereon all other instructions of the prophets and apostles for the edification of the church are built and whereinto they are resolved” (Works, 1:314-15). Owen attempts to avoid allowing the original context and meaning of any Old Testament passage to be lost; yet, he also maintains that a Christian exegete must ultimately find the passage’s Christological meaning.

Isaac Ambrose gives eloquent expression to the concept of Christ as *scopus* of Scripture in later Reformed thought:

Keep still Jesus Christ in your eye, in the perusal of the Scriptures, as the end, scope and substance thereof: what are the whole Scriptures, but as it were the spiritual swaddling clothes of the holy child Jesus? 1. Christ is the truth and substance of all the types and shadows. 2. Christ is the substance and matter of the Covenant of Grace, and all administrations thereof; under the Old Testament Christ is veiled, under the New Covenant revealed. 3. Christ is the centre and meeting place of all the promises; for in him the promises of God are yea and Amen. 4. Christ is the thing signified, sealed and exhibited in the Sacraments of the Old and New Testament. 5. Scripture genealogies use to lead us on to the true line of Christ. 6. Scripture chronologies are to discover to us the times and seasons of Christ. 7. Scripture-laws are our schoolmasters to bring us to Christ, the moral by correcting, the ceremonial by directing. 8. Scripture-gospel is Christ’s light, whereby we hear and follow him; Christ’s cords of love, whereby we are drawn into sweet union and communion with him; yea it is the very power of God unto salvation unto all them that believe in Christ Jesus; and therefore think of Christ as the very substance, marrow, soul and scope of the whole Scriptures.

Muller, commenting on *scopus* in seventeenth-century Reformed thought, says:

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100 This English translation of the original Latin was provided by Amy Chifici, M.A. Cf. Schaff, *Creeds, III*, 212-213, for the German and Latin originals.


Christ...is the fundamentum and scopus of Scripture inasmuch as he is the redemptive center on which the entire principium cognoscendi or cognitive foundation rests and in whom it finds its unity.\textsuperscript{104}

The theologies of the Reformers and of their orthodox successors consistently place Christ at the center of their discussions of redemption, consistently understand Christ as the center and fulfill-ment of divine revelation, and equally consistently understand the causality of salvation as grounded in the divine purpose. Christ, as Mediator, must be subordinate to the divine purpose, even as Christ, considered as God, is the one who with the Father and the Spirit decrees salvation before the foundation of the world: Causal theocentricity guarantees redemptive Christocentricity. Neither the doctrine of God nor the doctrine of Christ, however, serves as the basis of a neatly deduced system: The loci themselves arise out of the interpretation of Scripture.\textsuperscript{105}

James M. Renihan, commenting on the confessional theology of the Reformed orthodox, says:

It is necessary to insist that there is a further step to identify in this process, which is to say that in agreement with Athanasius, the English Reformed confessors understood their statement to imply that Christ is the scope of all Scripture. This is evident in at least two ways. First, the Reformed authors, following the text of Holy Writ, argue that Christ is the incarnation of the glory of God. If the scope of Scripture is to give all glory to God, and all glory comes to God through Him, then by definition this statement must have reference to the person of Jesus Christ. Secondly, they recognized the intimate relationship present between the two testaments and their constituent books. The Old, whether considered as a whole or in its parts, is an anticipation of the work of God in Christ. From the protevangelium through the historical revelation of the Covenant of Grace in the history of Israel, everything looked forward to his coming. Likewise, the New is the full revelation of the promises progressively revealed in the Old. This unity finds it fullness in Jesus Christ and his work. In every place, the Bible points to Christ—he is the target—the scope of Scripture.\textsuperscript{106}

According to Reformed orthodoxy, then, Christ is the scopus (target) toward which the whole of Scripture tends. This view of the scopus of Scripture was closely related to their view of the relation between the testaments. The relationship between the testaments was seen in terms of a promise/fulfillment, figure/reality, type/anti-type motif.\textsuperscript{107} Hence, “the New Testament may be understood as the interpreter of the Old.”\textsuperscript{108} Revelation was progressive, self-interpreting, and consummated in the coming of Christ.

Here we must be careful not to infuse later, neo-orthodox concepts of Christocentricity into the historical data. The Christocentricity of the Reformed and Reformed orthodox was redemptive-historical and not principial, as Muller points out.\textsuperscript{109} In other words, it came as a result of Scripture functioning as the principium cognoscendi (principle of knowing) or cognitive foundation of our knowledge of God. Scripture, and not Christ the Mediator, is a fundamental principle or foundation of theology in Reformed orthodoxy.\textsuperscript{110} They started with Scripture and concluded Christocentricity in terms of the historia salutis. Their Christocentricity is revelational and connected to redemption. As Muller says, such “Christocentrism consistently places Christ at

\textsuperscript{104} Muller, “Calvin and the “Calvinists”,” II:156.
\textsuperscript{105} Muller, “Calvin and the “Calvinists”,” II:155.
\textsuperscript{106} Renihan, “Theology on Target: The Scope of the Whole,” 43-44. Renihan makes these comments after quoting John Owen, who, according to Renihan, was, in effect, exegeting “the scope of the whole” terminology as found in the Westminster Confession, Savoy Declaration, and Second London Confession.
\textsuperscript{107} Muller, PRRD, II:492.
\textsuperscript{108} Muller, PRRD, II:492.
\textsuperscript{109} Muller, “Calvin and the “Calvinists”,” II:157.
\textsuperscript{110} Muller, Dictionary, 245-246.
the historical and at the soteriological center of the work of redemption.”

But we must still be careful with the term Christocentricity. Christology must not be viewed as the central dogma of the Reformed orthodox. As Muller says:

Such doctrines as God, predestination, Christ, and covenant provide not alternative but coordinate *foci* – and the presence of each and every one of these topics in theology rests not on a rational, deductive process but on their presence as *loci* in the exegetical or interpretive tradition of the church.

The method of Reformed orthodoxy, then, started with the text of Scripture and its exegesis, went to the synthesizing of Scripture in terms of interpreting difficult passages in light of clearer ones and identifying its (i.e., Scripture’s) unifying theme or themes based on its various levels of meaning, and then (and only then) categorizing the exegetical and canonical-theological findings in the long-practiced *loci* method of dogmatics.

8. A Multi-Sourced Method

As stated above, the Reformed orthodox method was foundationally exegetical and based on the Scriptures. But the Reformed orthodox wanted to place their findings within the long tradition of Western theology. They did this by utilizing various sources in the process of their theological formulation. Muller identifies the sources of Reformed orthodoxy, in terms of their over-all theological enterprise, as follows:

1) Scripture, exegesis, and ancillary disciplines; 2) the ancient creeds and the confessions of the Reformed churches; 3) the church fathers; 4) the theological tradition generally, including the medieval doctors and the Reformers; and 5) the philosophical tradition and reason, specified as logic, rhetoric, and their methodological applications.

John Owen: Reformed Orthodox Theologian

How does all of this relate to John Owen and our purposes? John Owen fits into the era of high orthodoxy chronologically, methodologically, and theologically. Hence, we should assume that he will utilize the methodological tools of the day. This has been shown to be the case in several more recent studies. There are at least five reasons why Owen must be considered a Reformed orthodox theologian: his education, his sources, his intellectual context, his writings, and his utilization of key hermeneutical principles and trajectories. These reasons are standard among the secondary literature.

1. Owen’s Education

As discussed in the biographical section on Owen, he received a rudimentary education at home, entered a private, classical academy at Oxford, and then entered Queens College, Oxford, at the age of 12. The curriculum at Oxford, though affected by both the Renaissance and

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112 Muller, “Calvin and the "Calvinists”,” II:157.
113 Steinmetz, "The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis," 27-38, for a discussion of levels of meaning and also Muller, PRRD, II:469-482.
114 Muller, “Sources of Reformed Orthodoxy,” 45-55.
115 Muller, “Sources of Reformed Orthodoxy,” 45-46.
118 Toon, *God’s Statesman*, 5. Cf. Thomson, *Owen*, 15, where he claims that entrance to Queen’s at the age of 12 “…in the case of most youths would have been most injudiciously premature.”
Reformation, was basically medieval.\textsuperscript{119} The most influential professor at Oxford for Owen was his Reformed tutor, Thomas Barlow.\textsuperscript{120} Barlow lectured in metaphysics and was the university’s chief authority in polemics.\textsuperscript{121} Barlow created a bibliography for theological students. Trueman’s discussion on it is fascinating and relevant and, thus, will be quoted in full. He says:

Some idea of the kind of bibliographical emphases to which an Oxford theology student of Owen’s day would have been exposed is provided in the fascinating, and posthumously published, basic theological reading list of Thomas Barlow, Owen’s tutor. Barlow allows his convictions about the nature of theology and of human knowledge of God to shape the catalogue: there is a light of nature and a light of scripture which are the foundations for natural theology and revealed theology respectively. Of these, Barlow stresses Aquinas, and commentators on Aquinas, as of particular use, indicating his own strong Thomist instincts, many of which parallel concerns in Owen. Barlow immediately proceeds, however, to list over six pages of editions of the Hebrew and Greek texts of the Old and New Testaments, of the Septuagint and the Vulgate, and various lexical and linguistic aids. He then follows with sections devoted to biblical commentaries (from ancient to modern, and reflecting many theological perspectives, from orthodox to heretical), works on ancient Jewish society, a variety of books on the canon, basic outlines of early church history, and books on the apocrypha and non-canonical early writings. Thus, the first 21 of the book’s 70 pages are devoted specifically to books of direct relevance to understanding the text and the context of scripture. Then, a little later in the treatise, Barlow spends time listing useful books on biblical chronology and geography, including maps, with which the Bible student should be familiar. The biblical emphasis, even in this book list provided by the most philosophical of seventeenth-century Oxford’s theologians, is clear and exemplary.\textsuperscript{122}

Owen’s university education exposed him to a scholastic method of study via its curriculum and professors, primarily Barlow and John Prideaux.\textsuperscript{123} His education forced him to study various sources and become familiar with the intellectual currents (movements and persons) of the past and present, as will be seen below. This type of education would surely prepare a young man to apply a theological methodology which, as we have seen, was the method of the Reformed orthodox.

2. Owen’s Sources
In good Reformed orthodox fashion, John Owen utilized various sources in his theological method. This can be seen in at least two ways: in his library and in the quotations and references in his writings.

Concerning Owen’s library, Barry Howson says, “In 1684 his extensive library was sold by public auction. It contained 1,418 Latin treatises, 32 bound volumes of Greek and Latin manuscripts, and 1,454 English books.”\textsuperscript{124} Owen’s library “included the major authors of patristic, mediaeval, and contemporary theology”\textsuperscript{125} and “collections on philosophy, history, geography and travel.”\textsuperscript{126}

Owen’s sources referenced in his writings included Christian as well as non-Christian authors. Rehnman lists Euripides, Hesiod, Homer, Horace, Aelian, Plutarch, Aristotle, Plautus, Suetonius, Pliny and Virgil as non-Christian authors referenced in various works by Owen.\textsuperscript{127}

\textsuperscript{119} Rehnman, “John Owen: A Reformed Scholastic at Oxford,” 182.
\textsuperscript{120} Rehnman, “John Owen: A Reformed Scholastic at Oxford,” 182.
\textsuperscript{121} Rehnman, \textit{Divine Discourse}, 20.
\textsuperscript{122} Trueman \textit{John Owen}, 9-10.
\textsuperscript{123} Rehnman, “John Owen: A Reformed Scholastic at Oxford,” 191.
\textsuperscript{124} Howson, “Hermeneutics of John Owen,” 353. Howson gets these figures from Toon, \textit{God’s Statesman}, 174, n. 1.
\textsuperscript{125} Rehnman, “John Owen: A Reformed Scholastic at Oxford,” 184, n. 13.
\textsuperscript{127} Rehnman, \textit{Divine Discourse}, 28. Cf. n. 37 for the references in Owen where these authors are cited.
Owen also frequently referenced patristic literature. Rehnman lists the following names and number of references: Ambrose 36, Augustine 206, Chrysostom 57, Clement of Alexandra 50, Clement of Rome 33, Epiphanius 36, Eusebius 94, Gregory of Nazianus 16, Gregory of Nyssa 2, Hilary 12, Ignatius 25, Irenaeus 30, Jerome 92, Justin Martyr 44, Lactantius 32, Origen 55, and Tertullian 122. Owen quoted (both positively and negatively) various medieval scholastics, among whom are Anselm, Aberlard, Peter Lombard, John of Damascus, Bernard of Clairvaux, Scotus, Bonaventure, and especially Thomas Aquinas.

Owen’s education was obviously instrumental in the formation of his personal library and in the subsequent utilization of sources referenced in his writings.

3. Owen’s Intellectual Context
John Owen was a post-Reformation, pre-Enlightenment theologian. Recent studies have concluded that his intellectual context was eclectic. Various influences played their unique roll in shaping his thinking and method. Rehnman lists five such influences: the Reformed tradition, humanism, a renovated and revitalized form of scholasticism, philosophical eclecticism, and Augustinianism.

4. Owen’s Writings
Various attributes of Owen’s writings witness to the fact of his Reformed orthodox methodology and theology. He utilized various methods for the articulation of theology. The Banner of Truth edition of Owen’s Works breaks down the 23 volumes under four divisions: Doctrinal (I-V), Practical (VI-IX), Controversial (X-XVI), and Expository (XVII-XXIII [Owen’s commentary on Hebrews]). This displays the variety of approaches Owen took to articulate his theology. He utilized the scholastic method, an exegetical/expository method, a more federal or linear/redemptive-historical method, a catechetical method, and at other times a more churchly method—sermons. While articulating his theology, he was in constant discussion with the Christian tradition. Trueman says, “Owen also articulates his theology in terms both of careful exegesis and of constructive dialogue with the exegetical and theological traditions of the church.” According to Trueman elsewhere, Owen’s exposition of Hebrews displays some of the characteristics of Reformed orthodoxy noted above. He says, “As Henry Knapp has demonstrated in impressive detail, …Owen’s commentary on Hebrews is a masterpiece of linguistics, textual exegesis, interaction with exegetical traditions, and theological synthesis.”

5. Owen’s Utilization of Key Hermeneutical Principles and Trajectories

The Holy Spirit is the only infallible interpreter of the Bible. In classic, pre-critical and Reformed orthodox fashion, Owen briefly articulates his view of special hermeneutics and the Scripture:

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128 Rehnman, *Divine Discourse*, 29, n. 44.
133 Cf. *BTO*.
136 Trueman *John Owen*, 7.
For although the Scripture hath many things in common with other writings wherein secular arts and sciences are declared, yet to suppose that we may attain the sense and mind of God in them by the mere use of such ways and means as we apply in the investigation of truths of other natures is to exclude all consideration of God, of Jesus Christ, of the Holy Spirit, of the end of the Scriptures themselves, of the nature and use of the things delivered in them; and, by consequent, to overthrow all religion.138

Owen obviously and firmly believed that the Bible should not be interpreted like any other book. How can it be? It—and it alone—is the word of God. In Owen’s BTO, he says:

The only unique, public, authentic, and infallible interpreter of Scripture is none other than the Author of Scripture Himself, by whose inspiration they are the truth, and by whom they possess their perspicuity and authority, that is, God the Holy Spirit.139

The scope of Scripture is God in Christ as Redeemer. Christ as scopus Scripturae can be seen in Owen’s writings in many ways. In his work on the Person of Christ, Owen says, “The end of the Word itself, is to instruct us in the knowledge of God in Christ.”140 A few pages later he goes on to say: “Christ is the image of the invisible God, the express image of the person of the Father; and the principal end of the whole Scripture, especially of the Gospel, is to declare him so to be, and how he is so.”141 In both these instances he uses the term “end” in a technical sense. In other words, Christ is scopus Scripturae.

Christ as scopus Scripturae can be seen from an exegetical standpoint in Owen as well. Commenting on Genesis 3:15 as the first promise of the only means of delivery from the effects of sin—Christ, he says:

This is the very foundation of the faith of the church; and if it be denied, nothing of the economy or dispensation of God towards it from the beginning can be understood. The whole doctrine and story of the Old Testament must be rejected as useless, and no foundation be left in the truth of God for the introduction of the New.142

Without a soteriological/Messianic interpretation of Genesis 3:15, in the mind of Owen, subsequent Scripture makes no sense. A Christocentric hermeneutic is the foundation of proper biblical interpretation.

Elsewhere, writing on the “Oneness of the Church” throughout redemptive history, Owen argues that the object of saving faith throughout redemptive history is “the Seed that was in the promise.”143 In this brief exercitation, Owen argues that God first gave the promise of salvation to Adam (Genesis 3:15). God’s Church is founded “in the promise of the Messiah given to Adam.”144 Owen argues that all subsequent revelation serves to unfold the first promise of the gospel to Adam. This promise, in Owen’s thinking, is the first revelation of the covenant of grace.145 Subsequent revelation unfolds the promise of the Redeemer and, in fact depends upon it. In his treatise on the Person of Christ, Owen says:

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138 Owen, Works, IV:208.
143 Owen, Works, XVII:121, 142.
144 Owen, Works, XVII:120.
145 Owen, Works, XVII:120.
This principle is always to be retained in our minds in reading of the Scripture,—namely, that the revelation and doctrine of the person of Christ and his office, is the foundation whereon all other instructions of the prophets and apostles for the edification of the church are built, and whereunto they are resolved; as is declared, Eph. ii. 20—22. So our Lord Jesus Christ himself at large makes it manifest, Luke xxiv. 26, 27, 45, 46. Lay aside the consideration hereof, and the Scriptures are no such thing as they pretend unto,—namely, a revelation of the glory of God in the salvation of the church; nor are those of the Old Testament so at this day unto the Jews, who own not this principle, 2 Cor. iii. 13—16. There are, therefore, such revelations of the person and glory of Christ treasured up in the Scripture, from the beginning unto the end of it, as may exercise the faith and contemplation of believers in this world, and shall never, during this life, be fully discovered or understood; and in divine meditations of these revelations doth much of the life of faith consist.\footnote{Owen, \textit{Works}, I:314-315.}

For Owen, “the revelation and doctrine of the person of Christ and his office” is the hermeneutical key providing interpretive cohesiveness for all of Scripture.

Owen’s Christocentricity has been identified by several recent studies. In an article dealing with Owen’s \textit{Dissertation on Divine Justice} and subtitled “An Exercise in Christocentric Scholasticism,” Carl Trueman says, “his theology is, at heart, thoroughly christocentric.”\footnote{Carl R. Trueman, “John Owen’s \textit{Dissertation on Divine Justice}: An Exercise in Christocentric Scholasticism,” \textit{CTJ} 33 (1998): 97.} Trueman entitles his conclusion “Owen’s Christocentrism” and says:

In asserting the necessity of Christ’s sacrifice, Owen is presenting a Reformed theology that cannot displace the historical person of the mediator from the center of the drama of redemption. There can be no eternal justification based purely on the decree: Salvation is as surely linked to history as it is to eternity. It is those who predicate the necessity of incarnation and atonement solely on the decreitve will of God who run the risk of marginalizing the historical person of Christ and undermining the importance of salvation history. In this context, Owen’s scholasticism serves not to eclipse Christ but to place him at the center. Indeed, as is clear from his argument, if it was not for his Thomist understanding of God’s causal relationship to creation and his acceptance of the validity of the analogy of being, Owen would have no way of attacking his opponents’ position. While it is true that his use of such arguments depends on assumptions that he does not justify, it is also true that any rejection of their validity renders his christocentrism epistemologically unsustainable. In the context of this dispute, at least, it is the rejection of natural theology, not its acceptance, that is the enemy of Christ-centered theology.\footnote{Trueman, “John Owen’s \textit{Dissertation on Divine Justice},” 103.}

In fact, Trueman goes so far as to say that on the issue of divine justice and the incarnation, Owen “is arguably not less christocentric than [his] opponents, including Calvin himself, but actually more so.”\footnote{Trueman, “John Owen’s \textit{Dissertation on Divine Justice},” 103.}

Kelly Kapic argues that Owen’s anthropology is formulated “in a christocentric pattern, pointing to Jesus Christ as the incarnate and true image of God.”\footnote{Kapic, \textit{Communion with God}, 65.} Even the Sabbath is Christologically transformed by Christ, thus further displaying the Christocentricity of Owen’s thought.\footnote{Kapic, \textit{Communion with God}, 212-214. Cf. Owen, \textit{Works}, XVIII:263-460 for Owen’s masterful treatment of a day of sacred rest.}

Sebastian Rehnman acknowledges this of Owen:

\textsuperscript{146} Owen, \textit{Works}, I:314-315.
\textsuperscript{148} Trueman, “John Owen’s \textit{Dissertation on Divine Justice},” 103.
\textsuperscript{149} Trueman, “John Owen’s \textit{Dissertation on Divine Justice},” 103.
\textsuperscript{150} Kapic, \textit{Communion with God}, 65.
His theology has, for all its adherence to scholasticism and contrary to the argument of much modern scholarship on Reformed orthodoxy, a Christocentric and practical character.\textsuperscript{152} Richard W. Daniels shows that not only redemption, but creation and providence are christocentric for Owen.\textsuperscript{153} Commenting on the doctrines of creation and providence in Owen’s thought, Daniels says, “It is difficult to conceive of a more Christocentric view of the purpose of God in creation than this, which subjects the creation and history of the universe to the manifestation of the glory of God in its renovation by the Son.”\textsuperscript{154} After acknowledging that Owen’s Christocentricity was not unique among the English Puritans, he then says:

In the development of this Christocentric theological system, however, Owen was unsurpassed. The lines which he traces from the doctrine of the person of Christ are bold, and long enough to reach every subject of doctrinal inquiry, showing that “by him, all things” [including all doctrinal truths] consist” (Col. 1:17).\textsuperscript{155}

In Daniels’ concluding words to his study on Owen’s Christology, he gives this tribute to him:

It is one thing to say Christian theology ought to be Christocentric, it is quite another to actually understand the entire spectrum of theological loci Christocentrically, or to articulate one’s theology in a way that manifests this Christocentricity. Owen does this, as we have observed with regard to the knowledge of God, creation, providence, the redemption of man, the mediatorial kingdom, the church, and the Christian life.\textsuperscript{156}

**Federal Theology among the Reformed Orthodox**

It is no secret that various Reformed orthodox theologians articulated theology utilizing a federal or covenantal model. There are many sources (primary and secondary) available for the contemporary reader which amply display and discuss this model.\textsuperscript{157} We will briefly examine a

\textsuperscript{152} Rehnman, *Divine Discourse*, 181.
\textsuperscript{153} Daniels, *Christology of Owen*, 178-193.
\textsuperscript{154} Daniels, *Christology of Owen*, 180.
\textsuperscript{155} Daniels, *Christology of Owen*, 517.
\textsuperscript{156} Daniels, *Christology of Owen*, 519.
few of the more important federal theologians of the Seventeenth Century to further set the context in which Owen wrote his BTO. This brief survey understands Federal Theology as a method and not as a distinct school.158

Federal or Covenant Theology did not begin in the seventeenth century. The seventeenth-century Reformed orthodox built upon the labors of their Reformed predecessors, who built upon the labors of others before them. Such theologians as Zwingli, Bullinger, Calvin, Ursinus, Olevianus, Rollock, Perkins, Ames, and Ball all played key roles in the early development of Federal Theology.159 We will look briefly at some of the key contributors to the development of federalism in the early and late Seventeenth Century, and even into the Eighteenth Century, to further set the wider context of John Owen.

1. William Perkins

William Perkins, a late sixteenth-century English theologian, was a theology professor at Christ College, Cambridge.160 He is known by some as the father or chief architect of English Puritanism. He had several works of note, especially his The Art of Prophesying and A Golden Chaine. The Art of Prophesying was a hermeneutical and homiletical handbook which influenced English and American Puritanism.161 Those who influenced Perkins’ theology most were men like John Calvin, Peter Martyr Vermigli, Theodore Beza, Jerome Zanchi, Casper Olevianus, and Franciscus Junius.162 Perkins utilized Ramist logic while articulating his theology. Peter Ramus was a sixteenth-century French logician and philosopher who simplified Aristotelianism and developed a system of analysis that was utilized by the Cambridge Puritans and passed on to their heirs. Ramism analyzed discourse by defining and dividing. Axioms were divided into two parts or dichotomies. Divisions could be subdivided down to their smallest units. As an affect of humanism in Ramist logic, there was an emphasis on practicality. This contribution of Ramism in Puritanism created the tendency in Puritan exegesis of Scripture to create sermons or treatise under two main considerations—exposition/doctrine and use.163

2. William Ames

William Ames, student of William Perkins at Christ College, Cambridge, became professor of theology at the University of Franeker, the Netherlands in 1622. Ames’ major work was his The Marrow of Theology.164 This work was very influential among various groups of Protestants in the Seventeenth Century. It follows Perkins’ utilization of Ramist logic in the articulation of theology. Ames has been called the “chief architect of the federal theology.”165

Ames was Johannes Cocceius’ (see below) theology professor and could have been the source behind two of his contributions to federalism: (1) a mediating position on the relation between the ordo salutis and the historia salutis and (2) the concept of a progressive abrogation

158 Cf. van Asselt, “The Fundamental Meaning of Theology,” 323, where he notes, “This should warn us against any facile juxtaposition of federal-biblical theology with scholastic-dogmatic theology…” ‘This’ in context refers to the fact that many late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Reformed theologians utilized Junius’ classification of archetypal and ectypal knowledge. Van Asselt claims that this is true of continental Reformed theologians as well as some English Puritans. Once again, this is further evidence that Reformed scholasticism was a complex method and not a static system of theology. Reformed orthodox theologians could be and were often both scholastic and federal.
159 For a well-referenced treatment of the history of Federal Theology in the post-Reformation era see Ward, God & Adam. Cf. also Golding, Covenant Theology, 13-66.
161 McKim, “Perkins, Williams (1558-1602)” in McKim, editor, DMBI, 815.
162 McKim, “Perkins, William (1558-1602)” in McKim, editor, DMBI, 815.
of the covenant of works. Commenting on Ames’ teaching on the relation between the ordo and historia salutis, van Vliet says, “The horizontal movement and the vertical “strikes” are continually in a state of intersection; predestination and covenant meet in unity.” In his discussion “The Administration of the Covenant of Grace before the Coming of Christ,” Ames combines aspects of the ordo salutis with aspects of the historia salutis. He does this in the three major Old Testament redemptive-historical epochs: from Adam to Abraham, from Abraham to Moses, and from Moses to Christ. In each redemptive-historical epoch, Ames shows how the stages of the ordo salutis were exemplified or as Ames says, “adumbrated.”

Ames held to what Van Vliet calls “a form of [the progressive] abrogation of the covenant of works.” Commenting on the New Covenant, Ames says:

4. The testament is new in relation to what existed from the time of Moses and in relation to the promise made to the fathers. But it is new not in essence but in form. In the former circumstances the form of administration gave some evidence of the covenant of works, from which this testament is essentially different.

While discussing Christian freedom under the New Covenant, Ames continues, “9. Freedom comes, first, in doing away with government by law, or the intermixture of the covenant of works, which held the ancient people in a certain bondage.” Ames viewed the Old or Mosaic Covenant as containing elements of the covenant of works which are not included in the New Covenant. This could well be where Cocceius first heard of the progressive abrogation of the covenant of works, though in seed form. Cocceius’ theory of progressive abrogation will be discussed below.

Finally, Ames’ method of articulating the covenant of grace was chronological or along redemptive-historical lines. He also saw the promise of the redeemer in Genesis 3:15.

3. Johannes Cocceius

One of the most important and controversial Reformed orthodox federal theologians of the Seventeenth Century was Johannes Cocceius (1603-1669), a student of Ames. Though German born, Cocceius lived most of his life in The Netherlands. He attended the University of Franeker from 1626-1629. He ended his teaching career as professor of theology at Leiden from 1650-

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166 Cf. van Vliet, “Decretal Theology and the Development of Covenant Thought,” 416 for a fascinating discussion suggesting this very thing.
169 Ames, The Marrow of Theology, 204 (XXXVIII:20-28).
170 Ames, The Marrow of Theology, 204-205 (XXXVIII:30-5).
176 Ames, The Marrow of Theology, 203 (XXXVIII:14).
1669. He wrote commentaries, works on philology, dogmatics, ethics, and his famous *Summa doctrinae de foedere et testament Dei* (*Doctrine of the Covenant and Testament of God, 1648*). This was the classic continental Federal Theology. “By means of the concept of foedus he sought to do justice, also in systematic theology, to the historical nature of the biblical narrative.”

Some of his followers (i.e., Cocceians) sought to integrate elements of Cartesian philosophy into his federalism, “in spite of Cocceius’s rejection of such a union.” Integrating covenant and kingdom he “developed a theology of history, or in his own words, “a prophetic theology.”

Cocceius held a controversial view of the Sabbath, which was confronted by Voetius and his followers, as well as issues of continuity and discontinuity between the Old and New Testaments.

Cocceius’ view of the covenant of works infused eschatology into his theology from the Garden of Eden. “The covenant of works opened up the possibility of a history with an eschatological prospect.” Paradise “was a symbol and pledge of a ‘better habitation.’” He was not the only Reformed orthodox to argue in this manner. If fact, as we shall see, the intersection of protology and eschatology through the doctrine of the covenant of works was quite common. Cocceius viewed the covenant of works not as a contract, “but rather amicitia, friendship—a concept that has medieval roots and which extends back into classical antiquity.”

He viewed God’s covenant as “essentially monopleuric” (one-sided) and yet assuming a dipleuric (two-sided) character once man engaged himself and concurred with God’s “covenantal initiative.”

He held a very unique view of progressive revelation in that he saw the covenant of works progressively abrogated as salvation history unfolded and advanced. Van Asselt comments:

One of the most peculiar constructions in the theological system of Johannes Cocceius certainly is the doctrine of the so-called abrogations. This doctrine, which is closely connected with the doctrine of the covenant of works and the covenant of grace, occurs in both systematic main works of Cocceius: *in the Summa Doctrinae de Foedere et Testamento Dei* of 1648 (§58) and in the *Summa Theologiae ex Scripturis repetita* of 1662 (cap. 31 §1). Briefly formulated, this doctrine describes some five degrees (gradus) by which God leads man into eternal life and by which the consequences of the violation of the covenant of works through the Fall are gradually abrogated.

Cocceius’ five degrees of abrogation were: (1) by the fall, (2) by the covenant of grace revealed through the first promise of salvation (Genesis 3:15) and its subsequent unfolding in both

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178 It is of interest to note that the most famous “Biblical Theologian” of the seventeenth-century Reformed orthodox also wrote a work on Dogmatics.
testaments, (3) by the incarnation, (4) by the intermediate state, and (5) by the eternal state. These degrees or stages of abrogation combine the historia salutis with the ordo salutis. Indeed, Van Asselt says, “the historical and the existential moments are combined.” Each epoch of the historia salutis has a corresponding state of condition in the ordo salutis. Cocceius saw movement and development along salvation-historical lines and sought to give expression to that via the slow but certain abrogation of the covenant of works and the slow but certain increasingly fulfilled covenant of grace. His views gave the appearance of driving a wedge between issues of forgiveness and justification in the Old and New Testaments and, thus, his theory was rejected firmly by Voetius and his followers. Van Asselt argues that the Cocceians themselves failed to develop their teacher in a manner that accurately reflected his thought and, thus, “the doctrine of abrogations as a means of coordination of salvation history and ordo salutis broke down, it became obsolete and so disappeared in Cocceian theology.”

Despite his oddities, Cocceius’ major contribution was the further development of the utilization of the concept of covenant throughout redemptive history (and even predating it via the pactum salutis) and articulating his theology in a more historical-linear fashion, though certainly not exclusively. He moved from the pactum salutis, to the covenants of works and grace, “One of the most important features of Cocceius’ theology is what we shall refer to as his historical method.” Cocceius viewed redemptive history as covenantal history and progressive. He utilized the analogia Scripturae and analogia fidei, as well as analogy, typology, and “his so-called prophetic exegesis” method of interpreting and applying prophecy. Through his view of the abrogations, “Cocceius brought about a powerful dynamism in his view of the covenant, which simultaneously lent it a strong eschatological orientation.” Cocceius saw revelation as redemptive, progressive, and eschatological from its inception.

4. Nehemiah Coxe
Nehemiah Coxe was a Particular Baptist. He is important in our brief survey for at least three reasons: (1) Coxe was the co-editor (and most likely the “senior” editor) of the Particular Baptist

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198 van Asselt, “Structural Elements in the Eschatology of Johannes Cocceius,” 83, cf. Ibid., 102, where van Asselt says of Cocceius, “…historical dynamics are of central importance to him.”
199 McCoy called Cocceius “the most eminent theologian of the federal school” (cf. McCoy, “Johannes Cocceius: Federal Theologian” in SJT 16 (1963): 352) and (we think wrongly) “not scholastic” (cf. McCoy, “Johannes Cocceius: Federal Theologian,” 353). McCoy’s analysis of Cocceus is fraught with Barthian presuppositions. For instance, he says, “God’s Word, which is primarily Jesus Christ, is revealed through Scripture, not in the words alone, but from faith to faith under the illumination of the Holy Spirit.” Cf. McCoy, “Johannes Cocceius: Federal Theologian,” 355. “The language of Scripture places before us in its words only metonymy, metaphor and the like; God gives the message.” Cf. McCoy, “Johannes Cocceius: Federal Theologian,” 358. In the article just referenced, McCoy devotes a whole section to trying to prove that Cocceus was anti-scholastic. However, cf. van Asselt, “Cocceus Anti-Scholasticus?” in van Asselt and Eef Dekker, editors, Reformation and Scholasticism, 231-251 where he challenges and puts to rest McCoy’s anti-scholastic interpretation of Cocceus.
Second London Confession of Faith (2nd LCF); Coxe agreed with John Owen and other seventeenth-century Reformed orthodox theologians on the function of the covenant of works as it related to the Mosaic covenant in redemptive history; and Coxe authored A Discourse of the Covenants that God made with men before the Law, which is structured after the Federal model, utilizes Reformed orthodox theological nomenclature, concepts, and sources, and is semantically Reformed orthodox, except portions of his exposition of the Abrahamic covenant(s).

Coxe’s treatise discusses God’s covenant with Adam, God’s covenant with Noah, and God’s covenant(s) with Abraham. It is constructed in a linear-historical trajectory from creation, to fall, to redemption in typical Federal fashion.

Coxe holds a robust Federal view of the covenant of works. He called it the covenant of creation, covenant of works, covenant of friendship, and a covenant of rich bounty and goodness. Coxe held that God created Adam in his image with the law written in his heart. It was the sum of this law that was promulgated on Mount Sinai and delivered more briefly by our Lord “who reduced it to two great commandments respecting our duty both to God and our neighbor.” Added to this moral law was “a positive precept in which he charged man not to eat of the fruit of one tree in the midst of the garden of Eden.” The covenant of works or creation was not co-extensive with creation but an addition to it. Coxe says:

In this lies the mystery of the first transaction of God with man and of his relationship to God founded on it. This did not result immediately from the law of his creation but from the disposition of a covenant according to the free, sovereign, and wise counsel of God’s will. Therefore, although the law of creation is easily understood by men (and there is little controversy about it among those that are not degenerate from all principles of reason and humanity), yet the covenant of creation, the interest of Adam’s posterity with him in it, and the guilt of original sin returning on them by it, are not owned by the majority of mankind. Nor can they be understood except by the light of divine revelation.

It is not from any necessity of nature that God enters into covenant with men but of his own good pleasure. Such a privilege and nearness to God as is included in covenant interest cannot immediately result from the relationship which they have to God as reasonable creatures, though upright and in a perfect state.
Adam had “the promise of an eternal reward on condition of his perfect obedience to these laws.”\footnote{Coxe and Owen, \textit{Covenant Theology}, 44, 51. Coxe gives three proofs with discussion for the promise of an eternal reward on pages 45-46.} The tree of life functioned sacramentally as “a sign and pledge of that eternal life which Adam would have obtained by his own personal and perfect obedience to the law of God if he had continued in it.”\footnote{Coxe and Owen, \textit{Covenant Theology}, 45. Coxe justifies this function of the tree of life as follows: “The allusion that Christ makes to it in the New Testament (Revelation 2:7). …The method of God’s dealing with Adam in reference to this tree after he had sinned against him and the reason assigned for it by God himself [i.e., Genesis 3:22ff.]. …This also must not be forgotten: that as Moses’ law in some way included the covenant of creation and served for a memorial of it (on which account all mankind was involved in its curse), it had not only the sanction of a curse awfully denounced against the disobedient, but also a promise of the reward of life to the obedient. Now as the law of Moses was the same in moral precept with the law of creation, so the reward in this respect was not a new reward, but the same that by compact had been due to Adam, in the case of his perfect obedience.” Here Coxe is articulating Owen’s (and others) view of the function of the covenant of works under the Mosaic covenant.} Adam’s violation of the positive precept of Genesis 2:17 was also a violation of “that eternal law that is written in his heart.”\footnote{Coxe and Owen, \textit{Covenant Theology}, 43, 51.}

Coxe sees the covenant of grace introduced via the promise of the gospel first revealed in Genesis 3:15. The \textit{2\textsuperscript{nd} LCF} (1677), 7:3 says, “This Covenant [the covenant of grace in context; cf., 7:2] is revealed in the Gospel; first of all to Adam in the promise of Salvation by the seed of the woman.”\footnote{Cf. \textit{A Confession of Faith Put Forth by the Elders and Brethren of many Congregations of Christians (baptized upon Profession of their Faith) in London and the Country, Printed in the Year, 1677} (Auburn, MA: B&R Press, Facsimile edition, 2000), 27.} In his \textit{Discourse of the Covenants}, he says:

11. It was from this design of love and mercy that when the Lord God came to fallen man in the garden in the cool of the day, and found him filled with horror and shame in the consciousness of his own guilt, he did not execute the rigor of the law on him. Instead he held a treaty with him which issued in a discovery of grace. By this a door of hope was opened to him in the laying of a new foundation for his acceptance with God and walking well pleasing before him.

1. For in the sentence passed on the serpent (which principally involved the Devil whose instrument he had been in tempting man, and who probably was made to abide in his possession of the serpent until he had received this doom, Genesis 3:15) there was couched a blessed promise of redemption and salvation to man. This was to be worked out by the Son of God made of a woman, and so her seed, and man was to receive the promised salvation by faith and to hope in it. In this implied promise was laid the first foundation of the church after the fall of man which was to be raised up out of the ruins of the Devil’s kingdom by the destruction of his work by Jesus Christ (1 John 3:8).\footnote{Coxe and Owen, \textit{Covenant Theology}, 55.}

Later Coxe adds:

From the first dawning of the blessed light of God’s grace to poor sinners faintly displayed in the promise intimitated in Genesis 3:15, the redeemed of the Lord were brought into a new relation to God, in and by Christ the promised seed, through faith in him as revealed in that promise.\footnote{Coxe and Owen, \textit{Covenant Theology}, 59.}

This understanding of Genesis 3:15 gives Coxe’s treatise a Christocentric flavor from the beginning. In the first paragraph of his work, he says:

The great interest of man’s present peace and eternal happiness is most closely concerned in religion. And all true religion since the fall of man must be taught by divine revelation which God by diverse parts and after a diverse manner\footnote{Here he is dependent upon Beza. Cf. Coxe and Owen, \textit{Covenant Theology}, 33, n. 1.} has given out to his church. He caused this light gradually to increase until the whole mystery of his grace was perfectly revealed in and by Jesus
Christ in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. God, whose works were all known by him from the beginning, has in all ages disposed and ordered the revelation of his will to men, his transactions with them, and all the works of his holy providence toward them, with reference to the fullness of time and the gathering of all things to a head in Christ Jesus. So in all our search after the mind of God in the Holy Scriptures we are to manage out inquiries with reference to Christ. Therefore the best interpreter of the Old Testament is the Holy Spirit speaking to us in the new. There we have the clearest light of the knowledge of the glory of God shining on us in the face of Jesus Christ, by unveiling those counsels of love and grace that were hidden from former ages and generations.

Not only is this statement programmatic for a Christocentric understanding of Scripture, it also reflects the fact that Coxe viewed special revelation as progressive. The 2nd LCF, 7:2 says, “This 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, until the full discovery thereof was completed in the new Testament.” Coxe saw Christ as the hermeneutical center and focal-point of the whole Bible (i.e., scopus).

Coxe utilized Reformed orthodox theological nomenclature and concepts. For instance, in the preface of his work, Coxe says:

The usefulness of all divine truth revealed in the Holy Scriptures and the great importance of what particularly concerns those federal transactions which are the subject of the following treatise are my defense for an essay to discover the mind of God in them.

Coxe clearly held to a covenant of redemption between the Persons of the Trinity before the world began. In the first chapter of the work, he briefly discusses the monopleuric (i.e., God’s sovereign initiation or proposal) and dipleuric (i.e., man’s restipulation) nature of covenantal engagement between God and men. Coxe defines the “general notion of any covenant of God with men” as follows: “A declaration of his sovereign pleasure concerning the benefits he will bestow on them, the communion they will have with him, and the way and means by which this will be enjoyed by them.”

Covenants spring from God’s “condescending love and goodness.” Covenant is not co-extensive with creation. God sovereignly proposes covenants with men in order to bring them to an advanced or better state than they are currently in and ultimately “to bring them into a blessed state in the eternal enjoyment of himself.” Adam “was capable of and made for a greater degree of happiness than he immediately enjoyed [which] was set before him as the reward of his obedience by that covenant in which he was to walk with God.” Coxe even held the view that “Moses’ law in some way included the covenant of

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220 Coxe and Owen, Covenant Theology, 33.
221 Coxe and Owen, Covenant Theology, 29. Emphasis added.
222 Cf. Coxe and Owen, Covenant Theology, 54 and 2nd LCF 7:3 and 8:1.
223 Cf. Coxe and Owen, Covenant Theology, 35 and Muller, Dictionary, 122, where he says, “foedus monopleuron…: one-sided or one-way covenant; the covenant as bestowed by God and exhibiting his will toward man.”
224 Cf. Coxe and Owen, Covenant Theology, 35 and Muller, Dictionary, 120, where he says, “foedus dipleuron…: two-sided or two-way covenant; Foedus dipleuron, therefore, indicates, not the covenant in itself or in its underlying requirements, but rather the further relationship of God and man together in covenant, and particularly the free acceptance on the part of man of the promise of God and of the obedience required by the covenant.”
225 Coxe and Owen, Covenant Theology, 36. Coxe is quoting or paraphrasing Cocceius’ Doctrine of the Covenant and Testament of God (cf. Coxe and Owen, Covenant Theology, 36, n. 7).
226 Coxe and Owen, Covenant Theology, 36.
227 Cf. Coxe and Owen, Covenant Theology, 36, and 49 both quoted above.
228 Coxe and Owen, Covenant Theology, 36.
229 Coxe and Owen, Covenant Theology, 47.
creation and served for a memorial of it.” This was the view of both Ames and Cocceius, as well as John Owen. Finally, Coxe utilized typology in a manner similar to others in his day.

Coxe utilized Reformed orthodox sources. In Coxe’s “Preface to the Reader” he acknowledges John Owen’s commentary on Hebrews 8. Coxe had thought about continuing his treatment of God’s federal transactions with man by dealing with the Mosaic covenant, however, Owen’s treatment of these issues satisfied him. Coxe quotes or references many Reformed orthodox theologians: for instance, Beza, Cocceius, Rivet, Ainsworth, Strong, Pareus, Owen, Whiston, and Junius.

Coxe articulated Reformed orthodox views of the covenants of works and grace, though with his Particular Baptist view of the function of the covenant of circumcision made with Abraham. He understood revelation to be progressive and Christo-climactic. Christ, for Coxe, was the *scopus* of Scripture. Coxe also articulated a view of the Garden of Eden that we have seen before: God offered an eternal reward of unbroken communion and future blessedness with him to Adam. In other words, Adam had an eschatology; protology is eschatological in Coxe’s Federal scheme.

### 5. Herman Witsius

The Dutch theologian Herman Witsius (1636-1708) served several congregations as pastor, then became professor of theology, serving “at Franeker (1675-1680), then at Utrecht (1680-1698), and finally at Leiden (1698-1707).” He published his famous *The Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man Comprehending A Complete Body of Divinity* in 1677. It was offered as somewhat of a peace effort between the Voetians and Cocceians. According to Ramsey and

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230 Coxe and Owen, *Covenant Theology*, 46.
232 Cf. Coxe and Owen, *Covenant Theology*, 45 (the tree of life as a type of the eschatological state), 47-48 (Adam as a type of Christ), 57 (the garments or coats of skin as a type of imputed righteousness), and 62-64 (the Ark as a type of Christ or the church).
233 Coxe and Owen, *Covenant Theology*, 30. Coxe said, “That notion (which is often supposed in this discourse) that the old covenant and the new differ in substance and not only in the manner of their administration, certainly requires a larger and more particular handling to free it from those prejudices and difficulties that have been cast on it by many worthy persons who are otherwise minded. Accordingly, I designed to give a further account of it in a discourse of the covenant made with Israel in the wilderness and the state of the church under the law. But when I had finished this and provided some materials also for what was to follow, I found my labor for the clearing and asserting of that point happily prevented by the coming out of Dr. Owen’s third volume on Hebrews. There it is discussed at length and the objections that seem to lie against it are fully answered, especially in the exposition of the eighth chapter. I now refer my reader there for satisfaction about it which he will find commensurate to what might be expected from so great and learned a person.”
234 Coxe and Owen, *Covenant Theology*, 33.
235 Coxe and Owen, *Covenant Theology*, 34, 36.
236 Coxe and Owen, *Covenant Theology*, 33, 84, 86.
237 Coxe and Owen, *Covenant Theology*, 61, 86.
238 Coxe and Owen, *Covenant Theology*, 77.
239 Coxe and Owen, *Covenant Theology*, 77.
240 Coxe and Owen, *Covenant Theology*, 108.
241 Coxe and Owen, *Covenant Theology*, 111.
242 Coxe and Owen, *Covenant Theology*, 126.
244 Ramsey and Beeke “Introduction: The Life and Theology of Herman Witsius (1636-1706)” in *An Analysis of Herman Witsius’s The Economy of the Covenants*, iii-xxiv.
245 See the discussion above for the issues at stake and Ramsey and Beeke “Introduction: The Life and Theology of Herman Witsius (1636-1706),” vi.
Beeke, “In governing his systematic theology by the concept of covenant, Witsius uses Cocceian methods while maintaining essentially Voetian theology.” 246 “Witsius wrote his *magnum opus* on the covenants to promote peace among Dutch theologians who were divided on covenant theology.” 247 His *Economy of the Covenants* contains four books: Book I – The Covenant of Works; Book II – The Covenant of Redemption; Book III – The Covenant of Grace (*ordo salutis*); and Book IV – The Covenant of Grace (*historia salutis*). 248

Witsius starts his *magnum opus* by discussing divine covenants in general. He offers a brief study of the etymology of the Hebrew and Greek words for covenant. 249 He then states “the nature of the covenant of God with man” in these words, “A covenant of God with man, is an agreement between God and man, about the way of obtaining consummate happiness; including a combination of eternal destruction, with which the contemner of the happiness, offered in that way, is to be punished.” 250 He argues that covenants are comprised of a promise, a condition, and a sanction. 251 The covenant of works, or of nature, or of the law is “an agreement between God and Adam…by which God promised eternal life and happiness…, if he [i.e., Adam] yielded obedience…; threatening him with death if he failed but in the least point: and Adam accepted this condition.” 253 Here we see Witsius utilizing the concepts of monopleurism and dipleurism as did Coxe. Also, a hint of Edenic eschatology can be seen here as well. Adam was to keep the law of nature, which is comprised of the Decalogue in substance and was “implanted…at his creation,”255 as well as keep the positive precept forbidding him from eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:16-17). 256 Witsius sees Adam in a probationary state and capable of arriving at a higher, more blessed state of existence. He says:

> That man was not yet arrived at the utmost pitch of happiness, but [was] to expect a still greater good, after his course of obedience was over. This was hinted by the prohibition of the most delightful tree, whose fruit was, of any other, greatly to be desired; and this argued some degree of imperfection in that state, in which man was forbid the enjoyment of some good.  

The more blessed state of existence was “eternal life, that is the most perfect fruition of himself [i.e., God], and that forever, after finishing his course of obedience.” 258 This promise of life flowed out of God’s goodness and bounty and not out of any strict necessity. 259 The Garden of Eden, according to Witsius, was a pledge, a type, a symbol, both temporary and anticipatory, of a better state yet to be enjoyed. 260 In other words, protology is, as we have seen in other Reformed orthodox theologians, eschatological.

Witsius cites Hosea 6:7 as proof that Adam broke covenant with God in the Garden when he sinned. 261 Adam’s sin brought him and the entire human race to spiritual ruin. 262

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247 Ramsey and Beeke “Introduction: The Life and Theology of Herman Witsius (1636-1706),” x.
248 Cf. Ramsey and Beeke “Introduction: The Life and Theology of Herman Witsius (1636-1706),” xi for a slightly different, though essentially the same breakdown.
The covenant of redemption is the pre-temporal foundation for the temporal covenant of grace.\footnote{Witsius, \textit{Economy of the Covenants}, I:165.} The covenant of grace is made between God and the elect.\footnote{Witsius, \textit{Economy of the Covenants}, I:281ff.} It is first revealed in Genesis 3:15\footnote{Witsius, \textit{Economy of the Covenants}, II:108ff.} and then progressively unfolded in five redemptive-historical epochs: Adam to Noah; Noah to Abraham; Abraham to Moses; Moses to Christ; and the New Testament.\footnote{Witsius, \textit{Economy of the Covenants}, I:313-316.}

Book IV is where Witsius follows a more \textit{historia salutis} model. Genesis 3:15 is the first promise of the gospel and the first revelation of the covenant of grace. This crucial text is programmatic for Witsius. His exposition of Genesis 3:15 covers twenty pages.\footnote{Witsius, \textit{Economy of the Covenants}, II:108-128.} He then traces the covenant of grace through Noah, Abraham, Moses, and the prophets. Of interest to our survey is the fact that Witsius holds that the Mosaic covenant cannot be viewed simply as a covenant of grace or works. It is a national covenant, subservient to both the covenants of works and grace. Witsius says, “It was a \textit{national covenant} between God and Israel…[It] supposed a covenant of grace…and the doctrine of the covenant of works.”\footnote{Witsius, \textit{Economy of the Covenants}, II:186.}

Witsius, as others we have surveyed, is somewhat typical in his articulation of federalism. He starts with the covenant of works. Adam sins and brings ruin upon himself and the entire human race. Because of God’s pre-temporal purpose to save the elect through a Mediator, he reveals his purposes of grace through the first gospel promise in Genesis 3:15. This gospel promise is progressively expanded through various historical types\footnote{Witsius, \textit{Economy of the Covenants}, II:188-231.} and through explicit Old Testament prophecies and culminates in our Lord Jesus Christ, the \textit{scopus} of Scripture.

6. Jonathan Edwards

Though Edwards was neither European nor seventeenth-century Reformed orthodox, he certainly wrote within that theological tradition and was very aware of the intellectual currents of his day.\footnote{D.A. Sweeney, “Edwards, Jonathan (1703-1758)” in McKim, editor, \textit{DMBI}, 397.} Probably America’s greatest theologian to date, Edwards was a prolific student and writer. He was somewhat unique in that he utilized a pre-critical hermeneutic, though living during the early days of the emerging critical era.\footnote{Sweeney, “Edwards, Jonathan (1703-1758)” in McKim, editor, \textit{DMBI}, 399.}

In 1739 Edwards preached a series of sermons that ended up being slightly revised and published in 1774 as \textit{A History of the Work of Redemption, containing the outlines of a Body of Divinity, including a view of Church History, in a method entirely new.}\footnote{Cf. Jonathan Edwards, \textit{The Works of Jonathan Edwards}, Volume One (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, reprinted 1990), 532-619.} In this work, Edwards sought, first, to discuss the redemptive story-line of the Bible in its scriptural order and, then, to give a history of the church as the implications of redemption accomplished applied throughout history. In his Preface, he says this body of divinity is unique in that it is written in the form of a history in order to show the most remarkable events “from the fall to the present time” and even to the end of the world which are “adapted to promote the work of redemption.”\footnote{Edwards, \textit{Works}, I:532. We will focus on the sections dealing with biblical history alone.}

Edwards’ \textit{History of Redemption} is divided into three periods: I. From the Fall to the Incarnation; II. From Christ’s Incarnation to His Resurrection; and III. From Christ’s Resurrection to the End of the World. Each period is further subdivided. The first period contains these subheadings: from the fall to the flood, from the flood to Abraham, from Abraham to Moses, from Moses to David, from David to the Babylonian Captivity, and from the Babylonian Captivity to the incarnation of Christ. The biblical section is approached in a linear fashion, tracing the biblical history of redemption chronologically.
From the outset of the first period in Edwards’ scheme, his Christocentricity is clear and ample. He says, “As soon as man fell, Christ entered on his mediatorial work.” Christ’s mediatorial work is founded in the covenant of redemption where “He stood engaged with the Father to appear as man’s mediator, and to take on that office when there should be occasion, from all eternity.”

His Christocentricity is further displayed, when he says that “the gospel was first revealed on earth, in these words, Gen. iii. 15.” “This was the first revelation of the covenant of grace; the first drawing of the light of the gospel on earth.” Edwards views redemptive history as Christocentric and progressive. “Thus you see how that gospel-light which dawned immediately after the fall of man, gradually increases.” He utilizes typology to see Christ progressively revealed in the Old Testament until the fullness of time had come.

The incarnation and subsequent life, death, and resurrection of Christ were climactic events in Edwards’ thought. The second period, from the incarnation to the resurrection, is…

the most remarkable article of time that ever was or ever will be. Though it was but between thirty and forty years, yet more was done in it than had been done from the beginning of the world to that time.

Edwards even has traces of doctrinal formulations seen as far back as Ames. He intersects historia salutis with ordo salutis, though he extends what he calls “the work of redemption” to the end of the world. He says:

And here, by the way, I would observe, that the increase of gospel-light, and the progress of the work of redemption, as it respects the church in general, from its erection to the end of the world, is very similar to the progress of the same world and the same light, in a particular soul, from the time of its conversion, till it is perfected and crowned in glory. Sometimes the light shines brighter, and at other times more obscurely; sometimes grace prevails, at other times it seems to languish for a great while together; now corruption prevails, and then grace revives again. But in general grace is growing: from its first infusion, till it is perfected in glory, the kingdom of Christ is building up in the soul. So it is with respect to the great affair in general, as it relates to the universal subject of it, and as it is carried on from its first beginning, till it is perfected at the end of the world.

He also sees a two-fold utility of the Decalogue as given by God to Moses: (1) as “a new exhibition of the covenant of works” and (2) as a rule of life. Commenting on “God’s giving the moral law in so awful a manner at mount Sinai,” he says:

And it was a great thing, whether we consider it as a new exhibition of the covenant of works, or given as a rule of life.

The covenant of works was here exhibited as a schoolmaster to lead to Christ, not only for the use of that nation, under the Old Testament, but for the use of God’s church throughout all ages of the world…

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If we regard the law given at mount Sinai—not as a covenant of works, but—as a rule of life, it is employed by the Redeemer, from that time to the end of the world, as a directory to his people, to show them the way in which they must walk, as they would go to heaven: for a way of sincere and universal obedience to this law is the narrow way that leads to life.  

Though Edwards’ title includes the words in a method entirely new, some elements contained in this work have precedent in seventeenth-century Reformed orthodoxy. Edwards articulated redemptive history in a Federal model. He held to the covenants of redemption, works, and grace. He saw the gospel first revealed in Genesis 3:15 and then progressively amplified in the Old Testament until the climactic event of the incarnation occurred along with its necessary redemptive accompaniments.

John Owen: Reformed Orthodox Federal Theologian?

Was John Owen a Reformed, Orthodox, Federal theologian? With the previous discussion as background to this answer, we now know some of the terms, concepts, and doctrinal formulations (and their meanings) to look for in Owen’s writings to arrive at an informed answer. How does Owen structure his work? Does he view protology as infused with eschatology via the covenant of works? Is the covenant of works co-extensive with creation? Is there a theology of Edenic probation in Owen? Is the covenant of works based on God’s goodness and benevolence or justice? How does the concept of law—moral and positive—function in Owen’s theology of the Garden? What happened at the fall to Adam and his posterity? How does Genesis 3:15 function in Owen’s overall discussion? When was the first gospel promise given and how does this relate to the covenant of grace and subsequent revelation? How does the Mosaic covenant function in the broad spectrum of redemptive history according to Owen? What place does the Mediator, our Lord Jesus Christ, play in Owen’s system? These and other pertinent questions must be answered to determine whether or not Owen was a Reformed, Orthodox, Federal theologian.

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284 Edwards, Works, I:547-548. Edwards presents a two-fold utility of the moral law given at Sinai. The way in which he presents the material may lead some to think he is presenting two mutually exclusive positions; either “a new exhibition of the covenant of works” or “a rule of life.” I think it better to take it as both/and. For a discussion on the highly nuanced views of the Reformed orthodox on the functions of the Decalogue in redemptive history see Richard C. Barcellos, “John Owen and New Covenant Theology,” 12-46.