COMMENTARY ON
R. SCOTT CLARK'S COVENANTALISM 23)

9:2 NCT ignores the unity of the covenant of grace.

This is hardly surprising, since NCT *denies the existence* of the "one and eternal covenant of grace" postulated by Bullinger in his highly influential 1534 tract of that title. We prefer to acknowledge the existence of the covenants actually described in the Bible, and base our covenant theology on *them*. The habit of abstracting bits from other doctrines (such as the Decree, the historic covenants, and the relationship between the Father and the Incarnate Son *in history*) to produce a concept of a generalized meta-covenant, is speculative and imaginative, but it is not the right way to organize the biblical data. We prefer to let the covenant texts speak for themselves. Of the six or seven historical covenants, there is a good deal of "unity" between them (they are all from the same God after all), but we think the *diversity* between them (that is, their individual features and contributions to the drama of redemption) is at least as important. This unity-and-diversity phenomenon cannot be handled by theoretical constructs, but only by exegesis of the different covenants *in situ*. Commonalities and differences can then be recognized and given the weight they deserve on exegetical grounds. The Noachic Covenant was a *universal* common-grace covenant, but the New Covenant is made with the *particular* Elect only; this represents "diversity." But both covenants are unconditional on man's part, since the first requires no faith, and the second has its faith requirement supplied sovereignly by God; this is a commonality, illustrating how they are in "unity." Similar comparisons can be easily identified for other pairs of covenants in the text. The unity and diversity of the covenants is a real factor of the revelation, but it does not warrant Bullinger's "one and eternal covenant," which is just an abstraction. Covenantalists need to ponder the implications of this influential work in McCoy and Baker's edition of it in *Fountainhead of Federalism* (1991).

3. It is unclear how NCT does not tend toward a radical discontinuity between Moses and Christ.

What does he mean by "radical discontinuity"? If he means Paul's distinctions between Law and Grace, I would say they were pretty "radical," in that they distinguished between two "roots" (*radix*) of life. "This do and thou shalt live" in the Pentateuch is quite radically different from "You are alive, therefore do" in Romans 5-6 and Gal 2:20, 3:3, 21-25, 4:31, 5:1-7, *etc*. Nobody can seriously maintain that the motive root of holiness under the Mosaic system was the same as under the New Covenant. OT saints did not maintain faith and obedience by a spiritual union with the risen Moses, but we NC saints live out of a supernatural union with the risen Christ. There was no risen Christ in the OT era, and that aspect of the work of the Holy Spirit could not exist until after the resurrection (Jesus in Jn 7:39, plus 14:17-18, Col 2:12-13, 20-23, 3:1-3). Jesus only became the "second Adam" in the incarnation.

If 1 Cor 10:1-4 is appealed to in order to show that the blessings of the Old and the New covenants are essentially the same, I would point out that these verses refer to the presence of God in protecting a *nation*, and only confirms that the OC was *a national covenant*, for the very next verses (5-12) refer to the apostasy of what was probably the majority. Being God's *nation* is a very different thing from being the *Body of Christ* (Col 2:19-20, Eph 1:19-23), and the Trinitarian implications of such OT situations are given full value under New Covenant Theology. But nobody can argue exegetically that the "Rock that followed" Israel was the *incarnate* Christ. There was a measure of "grace and truth" that Christ brought in the Incarnation that Moses' Law knew not of (Jn 1:14-17), as also a fresh relationship with the Third Person. That fact is quite prominent in the Trinitarian teaching of John's Gospel. There is no denying that the resurrection of Christ involved a "radical" alteration to the believing Remnant's

relation to Christ, formerly inconceivable under the Law. Three "radical" events, the *death* of Jesus, his *resurrection*, and his *ascension* separate Nation and Body by an unbridgeable chasm. The ascension is often forgotten these days, but it rates in Scripture with the other two, as among the most important events in the history of the world. The continuity between the Remnant and the Body is based on the common fact of Election, not on an abstract covenantal construct. Further, the nature of the one Body as involving Gentiles as "joint-heirs, joint-members, and joint-partakers" of *the Promise* (probably a glance at the Abrahamic Covenant) in Ephesians 3:1-10, is explicitly stated (verse 5) to have been unknown in the OT era. The Mosaic system kept Jew and Gentile strictly apart, even for a time after conversion to Judaism. The prophets never confused Israel and the Gentiles in their Kingdom predictions, and the KJV rendering of Acts 7:38 as "the *church* in the wilderness" has misled ecclesiologists for centuries.

Further, Paul never once refers to a "one covenant" idea. The plural covenants (*diathekai*) in Romans 9:4 is a classic case of the *total absence* of any unified covenant idea in Paul. He never refers to it, especially when (if it were true) it would be most useful. When he is arguing that circumcision is not for the believer, he never says that Christians have no need of it because "they have baptism which replaces it" under the New Covenant. The Apostles at Jerusalem never thought of it either, as their letter on the topic of how to treat sensitive Jewish believers in Gentile churches, shows (Acts 15:22-29).

4. NCT does not account for the distinction between Moses and Abraham.

One would think that Moses and Abraham were "distinct" because they lived 500 years apart, but there are other important differences. Traditional Covenantalism assumes that the Mosaic Covenant was just an RSV or "expanded version" of the Abrahamic. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Mosaic Covenant *assumed the truth* of the Promise (and the *unconditional* nature of that covenant), and "added" the Law and other parts of the Jewish constitution to it to make sin clearer (Gal 3:18-22), to make a path of faith-access to God through the sacrificial system, to provide for national worship through the Feasts, to clarify the divine attributes, and to point more clearly to Christ through its obvious deficiencies as outlined in Hebrews. But Abraham was never absorbed into Moses, and the provisions were quite different, the Mosaic system being *heavily conditional*. Abraham and Melchizedek were *Gentiles*, while Moses, Aaron, and the Nation were all *Jews*. This surely, is a "radical distinction." The Mosaic Covenant "grew old and disappeared." The Abrahamic Covenant is still in force. If that is not "distinct" enough for Clark I can't think how to make them more distinct, except by adding a long list of further "distinctions." But you don't need any knowledge of biochemistry to tell chalk from cheese.

5. NCT tends towards antinomianism.

This was an absurd accusation against evangelical Calvinists in the 1600s, and it is no less absurd in the present century. Nobody who agrees with the dozens of *ethical injunctions of the New Covenant Canon* (the NC itself), can possibly imagine that a NC believer is going to think that there is no ethical responsibility under the New Covenant. In the 1600s, "antinomian" was an epithet intended as an insult against people like Dr. Tobias Crisp and many other Puritans who saw that state-enforced legalism was failing as a tool for sanctifying society under a state-church order. Jesus pointed the Jews to the Law, but that was when he and they were "under the Law." There is a Cross standing between me and *then*. "We have an Altar" † (Heb 13:10), an altar that sets legalism of all kinds aside forever.

When the NC documents proscribe idolatry, and adultery, and lying to the church, this is *not* because the Ten Commandments are their standard, but because we worship the same Jehovah as imposed the Law on the Jewish Nation. Paul's refutation of sabbatarianism proves that.