

THE

Christ

OF THE

COVENANTS

O. PALMER
ROBERTSON

THE CHRIST OF THE COVENANTS

by

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*To Judy
my invaluable helpmate
and beloved fellow-heir
of the grace of covenant life*

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Preface

THIS work focuses on two areas central to the concerns of biblical interpretation today: the significance of God's covenants and the relation of the two testaments. By understanding correctly God's initiatives in establishing covenants in history, a solid foundation will be laid for unravelling the complex question of the relation of the two testaments.

Virtually every school of biblical interpretation today has come to appreciate the significance of the covenants for the understanding of the distinctive message of the Scriptures. May the Lord of the covenant bless this ongoing discussion so that a fuller love of him who has made himself to be "a covenant for the peoples" will be kindled in the hearts of men of all nations.

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PART ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE DIVINE COVENANTS

1

The Nature of the Divine Covenants

WHAT is a covenant?

Asking for a definition of “covenant” is something like asking for a definition of “mother.”

A mother may be defined as the person who brought you into the world. That definition may be correct formally. But who would be satisfied with such a definition?

Scripture clearly testifies to the significance of the divine covenants. God has entered repeatedly into covenantal relationships with particular men. Explicit references may be found to a divine covenant established with Noah (Gen. 6:18), Abraham (Gen. 15:18), Israel (Exod. 24:8), and David (Ps. 89:3). Israel’s prophets anticipated the coming of the days of the “new” covenant (Jer. 31:31), and Christ himself spoke of the last supper in covenantal language (Luke 22:20).

But what is a covenant?

Some would discourage any effort to present a single definition

of "covenant" which would embrace all the varied usages of the term in Scripture. They would suggest that the many different contexts in which the word appears imply many different meanings.¹

Clearly any definition of the term "covenant" must allow for as broad a latitude as the data of Scripture demands. Yet the very wholeness of the biblical history in being determined by God's covenants suggests an overarching oneness in the concept of the covenant.

What then is a covenant? How do you define the covenantal relation of God to his people?²

A covenant is a *bond in blood sovereignly administered*. When God enters into a covenantal relationship with men, he sovereignly institutes a life-and-death bond. A covenant is a bond in blood, or a bond of life and death, sovereignly administered.

Three aspects of this definition of the divine covenants must be considered more closely.

A COVENANT IS A BOND

In its most essential aspect, a covenant is that which binds people together. Nothing lies closer to the heart of the biblical concept of the covenant than the imagery of a bond inviolable.

1. Cf. D. J. McCarthy, "Covenant in the Old Testament: The Present State of Inquiry," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 27 (1965): 219, 239. Delbert R. Hillers comments on the task of defining covenant in *Covenant: The History of a Biblical Idea* (Baltimore, 1969), p. 7: "It is not the case of six blind men and the elephant, but of a group of learned paleontologists creating different monsters from the fossils of six separate species."

2. The very fact that Scripture speaks of "divine" covenants, covenants made by God with his people, may be of great significance in itself. Apparently this phenomenon of divine covenants does not appear outside Israel. "Outside the Old Testament we have no clear evidence of a treaty between a god and his people," says Ronald E. Clements, *Abraham and David; Genesis 15 and its Meaning for Israelite Tradition* (Naperville, Ill., 1967), p. 83. Cf. also David Noel Freedman's comment in "Divine Commitment and Human Obligation," *Interpretation* 18 (1964): 420: "There are no convincing parallels in the pagan world . . ." to the covenants of God with man as found in the Bible.

Extensive investigations into the etymology of the Old Testament term for "covenant" (בְּרִית) have proven inconclusive in determining the meaning of the word.³ Yet the contextual usage of the term in Scripture points rather consistently to the concept of a "bond" or "relationship."⁴ It is always a person, either God or man, who makes

3. The inconclusive character of etymological evidence is acknowledged quite generally. Cf. Moshe Weinfeld, *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament* (Stuttgart, 1973), p. 783; Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross* (London, 1955), pp. 62ff. One suggestion points to the verb *barab*, which means "to eat." If this were the case, the reference would be to the sacred meal which often was associated with the covenant-making process. Martin Noth, "Old Testament Covenant-Making in the Light of a Text from Mari" in *The Laws in the Pentateuch and Other Essays* (Edinburgh, 1966), p. 122, argues against this hypothesis. He suggests that the phrase "to cut a covenant" then would involve allusions to different methods for making a covenant. On the one hand it would suggest the self-malediction of animal division. On the other hand it would point to participation in a covenant meal. Noth favors the suggestion that "covenant" derives from the Akkadian *birīt*, which relates to the Hebrew preposition בֵּין "between." He constructs a multi-step process by which the term attained adverbial independence through the phrase "slay an ass in between," took on the substantival meaning of "a mediation," which consequently required the introduction of a second preposition "between" and finally evolved into the normal word for "covenant," which could be used with verbs other than "to cut" (between). A third etymological suggestion points to the Akkadian root *baru*, "to bind, to fetter," and the related noun *biritu*, "band" or "fetter." Weinfeld, *op. cit.*, p. 783, regards this last suggestion as the most likely.

4. The recent argumentations of E. Kutsch that the term "covenant" means "obligation" or "commitment" indeed are fascinating. But they are not adequate to overthrow the basic concept that a covenant is a "bond." Kutsch argues that the definition of "covenant" as "obligation" holds whether the type covenant is one in which a person "obligates" himself, is "obligated" by a foreign power, or arrives at a mutual "obligation" with an equal party. He also notes that Hebrew parallelism frequently interchanges "covenant" with "statute" and "oath," which he feels would favor the meaning of "obligation" (E. Kutsch, "Gottes Zuspruch und Anspruch. *berit* in der alttestamentlichen Theologie," in *Questions disputées d'Ancien Testament* [Gembloux, 1974], pp. 71ff.). Cordial disagreement with Kutsch's theory as expressed in earlier articles is registered by D. J. McCarthy in "Berit and Covenant in the Deuteronomistic History," in *Studies in the Religion of Ancient Israel, Supplement to Vetus Testamentum*, 23 (1972): 81ff. McCarthy concludes that the traditional translation can stand, despite Kutsch's argumentations. While the divine covenants invariably involve obligations, their ultimate purpose reaches beyond the guaranteed discharge of a duty. Instead, it is the personal interrelation of God with his people that is at the heart of the covenant. This concept of the heart of the covenant was perceived in the history of covenant investigators as early as the work of John Cocceius, as seen by his stress on the effect of the covenant as making peace between parties. Cf. Charles Sherwood McCoy, *The Covenant Theology of Johannes Cocceius* (New Haven, 1965), p. 166.

a covenant. Still further it is another person who stands as the other party of the covenant with few exceptions.⁵ The result of a covenant commitment is the establishment of a relationship "in connection with," "with" or "between" people.⁶

The formalizing element essential for the establishing of all divine covenants in Scripture is a verbalized declaration of the character of the bond being established. God speaks to establish his covenant. He speaks graciously to commit himself to his creatures, and to declare the basis on which he shall relate to his creation.

The prominence of oaths and signs in the divine covenants underlines the fact that a covenant in its essence is a bond. A covenant commits people to one another.⁷

5. One exception would be Gen. 9:10, 12, 17, in which God establishes a covenant with the beasts of the field. Cf. also Hos. 2:18; Jer. 33:20, 25. Despite the role of impersonal parties to the covenant in these passages, it is still a "bond" that is being established with them.

6. The prepositions בֵּין , עִם , אֵת , and לְ may be used to describe this relation.

7. Much evidence supports the significance of the oath in the covenant-making process. For a full statement of the evidence that an oath belonged to the essence of covenant, see G. M. Tucker, "Covenant Forms and Contract Forms," *Vetus Testamentum*, 15 (1965): 487-503.

While the oath repeatedly appears in relation to a covenant, it is unclear that a formal ceremony of oath-taking absolutely was essential for the establishment of a covenant relationship. Neither the Noahic nor the Davidic covenant explicitly mentions the taking of an oath at the point in history at which these covenants were inaugurated, although subsequent Scriptures mention an oath in association with both these covenants (Gen. 9; II Sam. 7; cf. Isa. 54:9; Ps. 89:34f.). In his now-classic analysis of the elements of the Hittite suzerainty treaties, George A. Mendenhall first lists the six basic elements of the treaty. The list does not include an oath. Mendenhall comments: "We know that other factors were involved, for the verification of the treaty did not take place by the mere draft in written form" ("Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition," *The Biblical Archaeologist* 17 [1954]: 60f.). It is on this basis that Mendenhall proceeds to introduce item seven into the treaty form, which he calls "the formal oath." Yet he himself feels compelled to add: ". . . although we have no light on its form and content."

Scripture would suggest not merely that a covenant generally contains an oath. Instead, it may be affirmed that a covenant *is* an oath. The commitment of the covenantal relationship binds people together with a solidarity equivalent to the results achieved by a formal oath-taking process. "Oath" so adequately captures the relationship achieved by "covenant" that the terms may be interchanged (cf.

A binding oath of the covenant might take on a variety of forms. At one point a verbal oath could be involved (Gen. 21:23, 24, 26, 31; 31:53; Exod. 6:8; 19:8; 24:3, 7; Deut. 7:8, 12; 29:13; Ezek. 16:8). At another point some symbolic action could be attached to the verbal commitment, such as the granting of a gift (Gen. 21:28–32), the eating of a meal (Gen. 26:28–30; 31:54; Exod. 24:11), the setting up of a memorial (Gen. 31:44f.; Josh. 24:27), the sprinkling of blood (Exod. 24:8), the offering of sacrifice (Ps. 50:5), the passing under the rod (Ezek. 20:37), or the dividing of animals (Gen. 15:10, 18). In several passages of Scripture the integral relation of the oath to the covenant is brought out most clearly by a parallelism of construction (Deut. 29:12; II Kings 11:4; I Chron. 16:16; Ps. 105:9; 89:3, 4; Ezek. 17:19). In these cases, the oath interchanges with the covenant, and the covenant with the oath.

This closeness of relationship between oath and covenant emphasizes that a covenant in its essence is a bond. By the covenant, persons become committed to one another.

The presence of signs in many of the biblical covenants also emphasizes that the divine covenants bind people together. The token of the rainbow, the seal of circumcision, the sign of the Sabbath—these covenantal signs enforce the binding character of the covenant. An interpersonal commitment which may be guaranteed has come into effect by way of the covenantal bond. Just as bride and groom interchange rings as “token and pledge” of their “constant faith and abiding love,” so the signs of the covenant symbolize the permanence of the bond between God and his people.

A COVENANT IS A BOND IN BLOOD

The phrase “bond-in-blood” or bond of life and death expresses the ultimacy of the commitment between God and man in the covenantal context. By initiating covenants, God never enters into a

Ps. 89:3, 34f.; 105:8–10). The formalizing process of oath-taking may or may not be present. But a covenantal commitment inevitably will result in a most solemn obligation.

casual or informal relationship with man. Instead, the implications of his bonds extend to the ultimate issues of life and death.

The basic terminology describing the inauguration of a covenantal relationship vivifies the life-and-death intensity of the divine covenants. The phrase translated "to make a covenant" in the Old Testament literally reads "to cut a covenant."

This phrase "to cut a covenant" does not appear just at one stage in the history of the biblical covenants. Much to the contrary, it occurs prominently across the entire spread of the Old Testament. The law,⁸ the prophets,⁹ and the writings¹⁰ all contain the phrase repeatedly.

It might be supposed that the passage of time would have dulled the vivid imagery of "cutting a covenant." Yet the evidence of an abiding awareness of the full import of the phrase appears in some of Scripture's most ancient texts as well as in passages associated with the very end of Israel's presence in the land of Palestine. The original record of the inauguration of the Abrahamic covenant, laden as it is with internal signs of antiquity, first introduces the concept of "cutting a covenant" to the biblical reader (cf. Gen. 15). At the other extremity of Israel's history, Jeremiah's prophetic warning to Zedekiah at the time of Nebuchadnezzar's seige of Jerusalem literally bristles with allusions to a "cut-covenant" theology (cf. Jer. 34).

A further indication of the permeating significance of this phrase is found in the fact that it is related to all three of the basic covenantal types. It is employed to describe covenants inaugurated by man with man,¹¹ covenants inaugurated by God with man,¹² and covenants inaugurated by man with God.¹³

8. Gen. 15:18; 21:27, 32; 26:28; 31:44; Exod. 23:32, 34; 24:8; 34:10, 12, 15, 17; Deut. 4:23; 5:2, 3; 7:2; 9:9; 29:1, 12, 14, 25, 29; 31:16.

9. Josh. 9:6ff.; 24:25; Judg. 2:2; I Sam. 11:1, 2; II Sam. 3:12ff.; I Kings 5:12ff.; II Kings 7:15ff.; Isa. 28:15; 55:3; Jer. 11:10; 31:31ff.; Ezek. 17:13; Hos. 2:18; Hag. 2:5; Zech. 11:10.

10. Job 31:1; Ps. 50:5; I Chron. 11:3; II Chron. 6:11; Ezra 10:3; Neh. 9:8.

11. Gen. 21:27, 32; II Sam. 3:12, 13.

12. Gen. 15:18 (Abrahamic); Exod. 24:8 and Deut. 5:2 (Mosaic); II Chron. 21:7 and Ps. 89:3 (Davidic); Jer. 31:31, 33 and Ezek. 37:26 (new). The phrase is not used in conjunction with Noah's covenant.

13. These covenant relations initiated by man with God should be understood in

Particularly striking is the fact that the verb "to cut" may stand by itself and still clearly mean "to cut a covenant."¹⁴ This usage indicates just how essentially the concept of "cutting" had come to be related to the covenant idea in Scripture.

This relating of a "cutting" process to the establishment of a covenant manifests itself throughout the ancient languages and cultures of the Middle East. Not only in Israel, but in many of the surrounding cultures, the binding character of a covenant is related to a terminology of "cutting."¹⁵

Not only the terminology, but the rituals commonly associated with the establishment of covenants reflect quite dramatically a "cutting" process. As the covenant is made, animals are "cut" in ritual ceremony. The most obvious example of this procedure in Scripture is found in Genesis 15, at the time of the making of the Abrahamic covenant. First Abraham divides a series of animals and lays the pieces over against one another. Then a symbolic representation of God passes between the divided pieces of animals. The result is the "making" or "cutting" of a covenant.

What is the meaning of this division of animals at the point of

a context of covenant renewal. It is only on the basis of a relation previously existing that man may presume to covenant with God. Cf. II Kings 11:17; II Kings 23:3; II Chron. 29:10.

14. I Sam. 11:1, 2; 20:16; 22:8; I Kings 8:9; II Chron. 7:18; Ps. 105:9; Hag. 2:5. Noth, *op. cit.*, p. 111, does not regard this shorter phrase as containing an ellipsis into which the term "covenant" is to be supplied. Instead, he proposes that the phrase "to cut between" as it occurs in these passages should be regarded as a "particularly ancient and original expression" serving as the linguistic equivalent of the phrase "to slay (an ass)" as found in the Mari texts. This analysis of the phrase corresponds to Noth's rather elaborately developed hypothesis that the term "covenant" derives etymologically from the word "between," as mentioned earlier. According to his construction, the phrase "to cut between" would represent an earlier form of the phrase prior to the time in which "between" evolved into a nominal usage, thus demanding the introduction of a second "between" with the result that the phrase would read in its more familiar form "to cut a covenant between." Noth does not venture to explain why the full phrase "to cut a covenant" should appear in the most ancient texts (i.e., Gen. 15:18), or why the abbreviated form should still occur in post-exilic texts (i.e., Hag. 2:5).

15. For a full presentation of the extra-biblical evidence, see Dennis J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant* (Rome, 1963), pp. 52ff.

covenantal inauguration? Both biblical and extra-biblical evidence combine to confirm a specific significance for this ritual. The animal-division symbolizes a "pledge to the death" at the point of covenant commitment. The dismembered animals represent the curse that the covenant-maker calls down on himself if he should violate the commitment which he has made.

This interpretation finds strong support in the words of the prophet Jeremiah. As he recalls Israel's disloyalty to their covenant commitments, he reminds them of the ritual by which they "passed between the parts of the calf" (Jer. 34:18). By their transgression, they have called down on themselves the curses of the covenant. Therefore they may expect dismemberment of their own bodies. Their carcasses "shall be food for the birds of the sky and the beasts of the earth" (Jer. 34:20).

It is in this context of covenant inauguration that the biblical phrase "to cut a covenant" is to be understood.¹⁶ Integral to the very terminology which describes the establishment of a covenantal relationship is the concept of a pledge to life and death. A covenant is indeed a "bond-in-blood," or a bond of life and death.¹⁷

This phrase "bond in blood" accords ideally with the biblical

16. John Murray, *The Covenant of Grace* (Grand Rapids, 1954), p. 16, n. 19, judges that the evidence for understanding this phrase as referring to the cutting asunder of animals falls short of sure confirmation, although he acknowledges that there seems to be no other satisfactory explanation. Meredith G. Kline, *By Oath Consigned* (Grand Rapids, 1968), p. 42, accepts this explanation in the stride of his argument and cites supporting evidence from other current studies on the subject. Perhaps the "light . . . from other sources" which was lacking according to Murray's earlier judgment may be found in such a work as that of McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant*, pp. 5ff.

17. Recent scholarship has tended to extend the concept of "cutting a covenant" in many directions, often without adequate substantiation. Erich Isaac, "Circumcision as a Covenant Rite," *Anthropos* 59 (1961): 447, suggests that the calling of heaven and earth as witnesses to the covenant in Deut. 4:26 relates to the "cutting" of a covenant by means of allusion to the Babylonian creation myth, which involved the cleaving of a primeval being to form heaven and earth. W. F. Albright accepts the suggestion of A. Goetze that the division of the Levite's concubine (Judg. 19:29) and the hewing of the oxen by Saul (I Sam. 11:7) were intended to renew Israel's tribal covenant (review of A. Goetze's "The Hittite Ritual of Tunnawi" in *Journal of Biblical Literature* 59 (1940): 316).

emphasis that "apart from shedding of blood there is no remission" (Heb. 9:22). Blood is of significance in Scripture because it represents life, not because it is crude or bloody. The life is in the blood (Lev. 17:11) and so the shedding of blood represents a judgment on life.

The biblical imagery of blood-sacrifice emphasizes the inter-relation of life and blood. The pouring out of life-blood signifies the only way of relief from covenant-obligations once incurred. A covenant is a "bond-in-blood," committing the participants to loyalty on pain of death. Once the covenant relationship has been entered, nothing less than the shedding of blood may relieve the obligations incurred in the event of covenantal violation.

It is just at this point that the effort to relate the "covenant" idea in Israel's life and experience to the concept of a "last will and testament" must be rejected. It is simply impossible to do justice to the biblical concept of "covenant" and at the same time to introduce an idea of "last will and testament."¹⁸

The major point of confusion in these two concepts of "covenant" and "testament" arises from the fact that both a "covenant" and a "testament" relate to "death." Death is essential both to activate a last will and testament and to inaugurate a covenant. Because of this similarity, the two concepts have been confused.

However, the two ideas of covenant and testament actually diverge radically in their significance. The similarity is only formal in nature. Both "covenant" and "testament" relate closely to "death." But death stands in relationship to each of these concepts in two very different manners.

In the case of a "covenant," death stands at the beginning of a relationship between two parties, symbolizing the potential curse-factor in the covenant. In the case of a "testament," death stands at the end of a relationship between two parties, actualizing an inheritance.

18. Cf. J. Barton Payne's *Theology of the Older Testament* (Grand Rapids, 1962). Payne has organized the entirety of his Old Testament theology on the basis of a "last will and testament" understanding of the covenant. Notice also his argumentation in "The B'rith of Yahweh," *New Perspectives on the Old Testament* (Waco, 1970), p. 252.

The death of the covenant-maker appears in two distinct stages. First it appears in the form of a symbolic representation of the curse, anticipating possible covenantal violation. Later the party who violates the covenant actually experiences death as a consequence of his earlier commitment.

The death of the testator does not come in two stages. No symbolic representation of death accompanies the making of a will. The testator does not die as a consequence of the violation of his last will and testament.

The provisions of the "last will and testament" inherently presume death to be inevitable, and all its stipulations build on that fact. But the provisions of a covenant offer the options of life or death. The representation of death is essential to the inauguration of a covenant. The consecrating animal must be slain to effect a covenant. But it is not at all necessary that a party to the covenant actually die. Only in the event of covenant violation does actual death of the covenant-maker occur.

It is in the context of covenantal death, not testamentary death, that the death of Jesus Christ is to be understood. Christ's death was a substitutionary sacrifice. Christ died as a substitute for the covenant-breaker. Substitution is essential for the understanding of the death of Christ.

Yet death in substitution for another has no place whatsoever in the making of a last will and testament. The testator dies in his own place, not in the place of another. No other death may substitute for the death of the testator himself.

But Christ died in the place of the sinner. Because of covenantal violations, men were condemned to die. Christ took on himself the curses of the covenant and died in the place of the sinner. His death was covenantal, not testamentary.

Certainly it is true that the Christian is presented in Scripture as the heir of God. But he is heir by the process of adoption into the family of the never-dying God, not by the process of testamentary disposition.

On the popular level, it has been assumed that the Lord's Supper

was the occasion of Christ's making his last will and testament. But it must be remembered that it was a covenantal meal that was being celebrated on this occasion. In the context of the covenantal meal of the Passover Jesus introduced the provisions of the new covenant meal. Clearly his intention was to proclaim himself as the Passover Lamb, who was taking on himself the curses of the covenant. His death was substitutionary; his blood was "poured out" for his people. His words were not those of testamentary disposition, but those of covenant fulfillment and inauguration.

The Old Testament concept of the covenant must not be reinterpreted in terms of a "last will and testament." The total perspective of the Old Testament people concerning their relation to God was consistently covenantal. A complete redirection of their thinking simply cannot be accomplished.

Even on a more modest scale, the concept of "testament" cannot be substituted for covenant in the "Old Testament" Scriptures.¹⁹ The presence of provisions in the ancient Near Eastern treaty forms relating to succession arrangements does not provide adequate basis for imposing a "testamentary" idea on the biblical concept of covenant.²⁰ A treaty agreement may include succession arrangements as

19. The reader will appreciate the rather humorous situation of the author at this point. He is attempting to argue against the approach which would understand "covenant" as meaning "last will and testament," while being required at every turn to refer to the Old "Testament" Scriptures because of the traditional division of the Bible.

20. Cf. Meredith G. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King* (Grand Rapids, 1963), pp. 39ff. Kline notes the record of Moses' death and his blessings on the tribes of Israel as found in Deut. 33, 34. He ventures to designate these blessings as "testamentary," and suggests that they demonstrate "the coalescence of the covenantal and testamentary forms" (p. 40). However, no evidence suggests that the tribal blessing of Deut. 33 depended on the death of Moses for enactment. A blessing uttered before death is not the same thing as a testamentary disposition. Kline acknowledges that testament and suzerainty covenant are not simple equivalents (p. 40). But he then attempts to relate the two ideas on the basis of covenantal provision for dynastic succession. He suggests that the book of Deut. as a whole was "a Mosaic testament" from Joshua's perspective as Moses' appointed successor, while at the same time being a "covenant" from the people's perspective. This cannot be the case. The deuteronomic document cannot change its basic literary character just by being viewed from a different perspective. Kline has presented the most able case to date

one part of its stipulations. But the inclusion of such a section does not create a testamentary document. All the provisions of a last will and testament await the death of the testator. Certainly that is not the case with respect to the covenant commitments which God has made to his people throughout the ages.

A "covenant" may well include aspects which insure continuation of its provisions beyond those people then living. As a matter of fact, the biblical covenants extend to a "thousand generations" (Deut. 7:9; Ps. 105:8). But these provisions do not transform the covenant into a last will and testament.

A covenant is not a testament.

A covenant is a bond-in-blood. It involves commitments with life-and-death consequences. At the point of covenantal inauguration, the parties of the covenant are committed to one another by a formalizing process of blood-shedding. This blood-shedding repre-

for seeing the entirety of Deut. as a covenantal document. If the book does possess this basic form, it cannot suddenly transform itself into a testamentary document simply because Joshua is the one observing it. Joshua's succession to Moses is a provision of God's covenant as recorded in Deut. and not a provision of Moses' last will and testament. God as covenant lord appoints Joshua, not Moses as dying testator.

In making his case for viewing Deut. as a testamentary document, Kline cites a particular Assyrian treaty in which the entire purpose of the document is to assure the security of Ashurbanipal's regal authority over vassal nations after the death of Esarhaddon (see D. J. Wiseman, *The Vassal-Treaties of Esarhaddon* (London, 1958), pp. i, ii; 4, 5ff.; 30ff.). It does not seem quite appropriate to employ this specialized document as a means for interpreting a single provision within the book of Deut. A provision for succession within a covenantal framework simply is not the same thing as a testamentary document.

Kline also attempts to interpret the difficult passage in Heb. 9:16, 17 by reference to this supposed testamentary disposition related to dynastic succession (p. 41). The subject of Heb. 9:15-20, however, is not dynastic succession but covenant inauguration. It is the blood associated with the covenant inauguration ceremony, not the blood of a testator's death, that is in view in these verses. Heb. 9:16, 17 do not stand bracketed in a context of covenant inauguration as a "parenthetical allusion" to the dynastic testamentary aspect of the ancient suzerainty covenants. Instead, these verses rehearse vividly the principle that a "covenant" is "made firm" "over dead bodies," as verse 17a reads literally. For an extended discussion of these verses in a covenantal context, see below, pp. 141ff.

sents the intensity of the commitment of the covenant. By the covenant they are bound for life and death.

A COVENANT IS A BOND-IN-BLOOD SOVEREIGNLY ADMINISTERED

A long history has marked the analysis of the covenants in terms of mutual compacts or contracts.²¹ But recent scholarship has established rather certainly the sovereign character of the administration of the divine covenants in Scripture. Both biblical and extra-biblical evidence point to the unilateral form of covenantal establishment. No such thing as bargaining, bartering, or contracting characterizes the divine covenants of Scripture. The sovereign Lord of heaven and earth dictates the terms of his covenant.

The successive covenants of Scripture may emphasize either promissory or legal aspects. But this point of emphasis does not alter the basic character of covenantal administration. Whatever may be the distinctive substance of a particular covenant, the mode of administration remains constant. A covenant is a bond-in-blood sovereignly administered.

21. Cf. the survey of Murray, *op. cit.*, pp. 5ff.