Introduction

Great scholars are generative; they challenge orthodoxies not only for the purpose of establishing their own, but in order to liberate others to see the truth more accurately and with new eyes. The scores of essays in this volume manifest the generative power of Richard A. Muller’s work. In redefining the relationship between church and school in early-modern Protestantism, Muller has generated both a scholarly reappraisal and a churchly retrieval of an entire era of profound theological reflection. As a pastor and scholar, I can say with confidence that historian and layman alike owe him a debt of gratitude.

In Johannes Cocceius (1603–1669), we find a generative scholar in his own right, and an ideal candidate for the “Muller Method,” whereby figures ripe for reappraisal are liberated from the simplistic categorization of prior generations of scholars, and allowed to once again speak for themselves and in their own context.1 Cocceius is a relatively obscure theologian neatly categorized by accepted historiography as “biblical” and “covenantal”—and therefore anti-scholastic—in his method.2 Yet this anti-scholastic wrote not one, but two Summae, and his career was overwhelmingly concerned, as we shall see, with polemics. Even here, however, Muller puts us on guard against our age’s anti-polemical bias. Cocceius’ deepest concern was that his ideological opponents—Jews, Papists, and Socinians—might come to know the full grace of God revealed in Jesus Christ. In other words, his labors in the schools were driven by a deep commitment to the church’s evangelistic calling.

1 Muller, PRRD, 4:387–391. Muller’s method involves inquiry into continuities and discontinuities within a range of similar theological questions, which usually transcend or overlap humanist-scholastic-biblical antinomies propounded by earlier scholars.
2 The scholarship of Charles S. McCoy is indicative of these older dichotomies, “The Covenant Theology of Johannes Cocceius” (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1956); cf. Albertus van der Flier, Specimen historic-theologicum de Johanne Coccejo, anti-scholastico (Utrecht: Kemink et Filius, 1859).
Much contemporary scholarship on Johannes Cocceius has puzzled over his teaching of a five-fold abrogation of the covenant of works, by the covenant of grace, a prominent structural feature of his best known work, the *Summa doctrinae de foedere et testamento dei*. However, the abrogations are not prominent in the rest of his work, and have been overemphasized as a result of over-reliance on this single work. Indeed, the most hotly contested aspects of the Cocceian system during his own lifetime were all related to the much more pedestrian question of the nature of the distinction between the Old and New Testaments. This question had been central since the early days of the Reformation, when the widespread abandonment of a unified Latin text and a resurgent Gnostic impulse had raised numerous issues of discontinuity to the fore. This, to use Cocceius’ terminology, was a question of the *testamentary* distinction between the *ante- and post-Christum* dispensations.

The three major debates between Cocceius and the followers of Gisbert Voetius illustrate this. They concerned the nature of the Christian Sabbath, the distinction between πάρεσις and ἄφεσις as diverse modes of justification, and whether the nature of Christ’s sponsorship was closer to a *fide-jussio* or *expromissio*. Each of these debates focused on the relation between the Old and New Testaments, but one in particular, that over πάρεσις / ἄφεσις, suggests to us Cocceius’ motivation for his particular salvation-historical approach—namely, its polemical utility.

It is my aim in this essay to demonstrate that Cocceius developed a complex, even scholastic, federal system for the most practical of churchly purposes—the conversion of Jews and other errant faiths—by reexamining his distinction between πάρεσις / ἄφεσις with a particular eye to its usefulness for polemics. First, we will examine the evidence for Cocceius as a polemical theologian from the *Dedication* of his Hebrews commentary. Then we will look at his motivation for the distinction in *Moreh*