

THE COVENANT OF GRACE

SAMUEL PETTO

THE
GREAT MYSTERY
OF THE
COVENANT OF GRACE:
OR THE
DIFFERENCE
BETWEEN THE
Old and New Covenant
STATED AND EXPLAINED.

By SAMUEL PETTO,
LATE MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL AT SUDBURY IN SUFFOLK.

2007
Stoke-on-Trent

Tentmaker Publications
121 Hartshill Road
Stoke-on-Trent
Staffs.
ST4 7LU

www.tentmaker.org.uk

ISBN: 1 901670 37 6

©
2007

Previously published
Alexander Thomson, Aberdeen.
1820.

This edition has been retypeset with some of the
language and punctuation updated.

ORIGINAL PUBLISHER'S NOTE

The Publisher, having received many solicitations to undertake the republication of this Work, is happy to add the names of the following Ministers, entirely approving and recommending it, as a judicious and enlightened performance, well worthy the attention of Christians of every denomination.

Dr. M'Crie, Edinburgh.	Dr. Kidd, Aberdeen.
Professor Paxton, Edinburgh.	Rev. A. Gunn, Wattan.
Rev. George Moir, Edinburgh.	— Niel Kennedy, Logie Elgin.
Dr. Pringle, Perth.	
Rev. James Aird, Rattray.	— Hector Bethune, Alness.
— Matthew Fraser, Dundee.	— Hugh Ross, Fearn.
— Adam Blair, South Ferry.	— Thos. Monro, Kiltearn.
— W. Ramage, Kirriemuir.	— John M'Donald, Thurso.
— James Hay, Alyth.	— A. Stewart, Wick.
— Alex. Balfour, Lethendy.	— John Monro, Nigg.
— David Waddell, Shiels.	— Isaac Kitchin, Nairn.
— Pat. Robertson, Craigdam.	— David Anderson, Boghole.
— J. Ronaldson, Auchmacoy.	— Thomas Stark, Forres.
— John Bunyan, Whitehill.	— Simon Somerville, Elgin.
— James Millar, Huntly.	— Robert Crawford, Elgin.

CONTENTS.

	Page
INTRODUCTION Mark Jones	9
TO THE READER Samuel Petto.....	29
TO THE READER John Owen	41
CHAP. I. Of a Covenant in general, and the distribution of the Covenant into that of works and of grace, .	47
CHAP. II. Of the oneness of the Covenant with Jesus Christ and us,	59
CHAP. III. Of Christ as the sum of the Covenant,	71
CHAP. IV. Of the date of Covenant Mercies,	79
CHAP. V. General inferences from the whole,	83
CHAP. VI. Of the Old and New Covenant, what they are, and how distinct,	93
CHAP. VII. Of the nature of the Mount Sinai Covenant,	113
CHAP. VIII. Of the Sinai Covenant, whether ceased or continuing,	153
CHAP. IX. Of the good that was in the Sinai Covenant,	165
CHAP. X. Of the differences between the Old and New Covenant, and the excellency of the latter above the former,	169
CHAP. XI. Of the time of first coming into Covenant,	211
CHAP. XII. Of the evidences of interest in the New Covenant,	227
CHAP. XIII. Of the use of Absolute Promises,	235
CHAP. XIV. Of those that are called Conditional Promises,7.....	243

INTRODUCTION.

If John Owen is the forgotten man of English theology,¹ it may rightly be said that Samuel Petto is the unknown man of English theology.² However, with the timely re-publication of this book coupled with the recent resurgence of interest in Puritanism,³ Petto's name will, it is hoped, become more familiar to those wanting to understand the theological context of the seventeenth century. Indeed, several of his writings, which will be introduced below, deal with some of the principal theological controversies in the seventeenth century; controversies that will be better understood now that his excellent work, *The Great Mystery of the Covenant of Grace or The Difference Between the Old and New Covenant Stated and Explained*, has been made more accessible to students of English Puritanism.

Tentmaker Publications has done the church a real service in making available Petto's work on the covenants, especially

¹ There has, however, been a recent renaissance of interest in Owen during the last ten years which is correcting this fact first suggested by Carl Trueman.

² There is, to my knowledge, no secondary literature devoted specifically to Petto. However, scholars of the seventeenth century occasionally refer to Petto in passing. See Richard L. Greaves, "John Bunyan and Covenant Thought in the Seventeenth Century," *Church History* 36 (June 1967), 152, 162; Ivan Bunn, *A Trial of Witches: A Seventeenth-Century Witchcraft Prosecution* (Routledge, 1997), 184; Ian Bostridge, *Witchcraft and Its Transformations, c. 1650 - c. 1750* (OUP, 2003), 28; Geoffrey F. Nuttall, *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience* (Univ. of Chicago Press, 1992), 12.

³ There is a great deal of debate over what the term "Puritanism" means and who is a "Puritan". In this essay I am using it in its broadest sense, thus including Protestants both inside and outside the Church of England. Petto, then, is in some sense both a Puritan, by virtue of his theology, and a nonconformist.

for the contemporary reader who will no doubt be pleased with its accessibility. Unfortunately, there are few modern reprints of Puritan works devoted specifically to the doctrine of the covenant.⁴ Thankfully, however, we now have Petto to look to as we read this work commended by Owen, who declares Petto to be a “Worthy Author” who has labored “unto good success”; and, for my own part, I agree with Owen’s assessment.

In this introductory essay I would like to (1) give a brief biographical sketch of Petto; (2) review his other writings; and (3) introduce you to his very important work on the covenants.

BIOGRAPHY

Samuel Petto (c.1624–1711) was among the ejected ministers with the passing of the Act of Uniformity (1662). He matriculated from St Catharine’s College, Cambridge, on 19 March 1645 and graduated MA in 1648. That same year he became “Preacher of the Gospel” of Sandcroft in Suffolk. All that we know of his family life is that his wife’s name was Mary and they baptized their son Samuel at South Elmham St Cross on 27 April 1654. Mary, unfortunately, died sometime in 1655.

While still preaching at Sandcroft, as a Congregationalist minister, Petto mentioned in a letter, dated 17 August 1658, that many in Suffolk were either opposed to or had reservations about infant baptism. It is not surprising, therefore, that two of his works defended the practice of infant baptism at a time when the paedobaptism was being criticized by Baptist theologians such as Nehemiah Coxe, John Tombes, and Thomas Grantham.

In 1660 Petto was ejected from Sandcroft. He moved to the area of Norfolk and continued his gospel ministry. Despite the political change and attitude towards the nonconformists,

⁴ Those feeling particularly ambitious might wish to consult Owen’s recently translated work *Theologoumena Pantodapa*. See John Owen, *Biblical Theology*, trans. Stephen P. Westcott (PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1994).

Petto preached to a crowd of over 300 at Gillingham. During this time Petto was able to finish his various writing projects. With the passing of the Conventicle Act (1664) and Five Mile Act (1665), Petto, on May 1672, was forced to be licensed a congregational teacher at his own house at Wortwell. Two years later he began his long ministry in Sudbury, Suffolk.

At this time in Sudbury there was no settled minister in the town. Typically, services took place in conventicles; the teaching being contingent upon men like Petto who risked imprisonment because of their continued nonconformity. Many in Sudbury hoped to petition parliament to provide proper maintenance for Petto. Stephen Wright remarks, "... in 1684 local Tories alleged that the former mayor John Catesby had so favoured dissenters, that 'Mr Petto the Nonconformist preacher in the barn' had been unmolested there for ten years, only once having been brought before the quarter sessions, and then not punished."⁵ The petition to help support nonconformist ministers like Petto ultimately failed however. This was not Petto's only problem. On 1677, in a letter to Increase Mather, Petto speaks of his daughter, born to his second wife Martha, who has "become a prodigal".⁶ Less than a year later, however, the "prodigal" had returned.

Petto's correspondence with Mather gives us important clues into the value of the ever-growing list of printed works, especially to ministers who faced particular challenges due to the rise of heretical groups (i.e. Socinians, Quakers, etc.). For example, in a letter written sometime in 1672, Petto writes: "I cannot but thank you for the particulars contained in your letter; for which I have nothing to return but the Transactions of ye last year. . . . The Discourse of Mr. Boyle concerning the Origine and Vertue of Gems is not yet printed off: when it is, you shall not faile, God permitting, of

⁵ Stephen Wright, 'Petto, Samuel (c.1624–1711)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/22067>, accessed 5 May 2007].

⁶ 'Letters of Samuel Petto', *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 4th ser., 8 (1868), 341.

having a Copy of it sent you by y^e first ship y^t shall goe for y^r parts after its publication.”⁷ Similarly, in 1677, Petto writes: “I also intend to send with it [his letter], D^r Owen of the reason of faith”;⁸ and again in 1678, “I have herewith sent you three books *Christianismus Christianandus*, and M^r Ny’s paper, of a question which is much debated here, . . . also Mr Troughton of Divine Providence, . . . if I knew what other such bookes would be acceptable to you, I would send them.”⁹

In 1690 Petto’s second wife, Martha, had bore him twelve children. References to Petto in recent contemporary literature focus on Petto’s polemics against the rising practice of witchcraft in the late 1600s. His opposition to witchcraft was evident in his 1693 publication of *A Faithful Narrative*. During his remaining years Petto remained in Sudbury where he continued to gain the esteem of the dissenters. In 1711 Petto died in Sudbury and was buried in on 21 September in the churchyard of All Saints.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Petto’s *Works* cover various issues that arose in his pastoral context. They are, therefore, varied, covering topics such as witchcraft, eschatology, pneumatology, paedobaptism, and covenant theology. Besides his lengthy work on the place of the covenant at Sinai in relation to the covenant of grace, Petto defended the Reformed practice of infant baptism in his work, *Infant Baptism of Christ’s Appointment* (London, 1687), aware that “many books have been already written by others on this subject”.¹⁰ In this work Petto positively

⁷ Massachusetts Historical Society, Proceedings, 1st Series, xvi. 248

⁸ *Ibid.*, 431.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 343.

¹⁰ Samuel Petto, *Infant baptism of Christ’s appointment, or A discovery of infants interest in the covenant with Abraham: shewing who are the spiritual seed and who the fleshly seed. Together, with the improvement of covenant interest by parents and children* (London, 1687), A2.