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AND THE SUBSTANCE
OF THE COVENANT

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CASPAR OLEVIAN
AND THE SUBSTANCE
OF THE COVENANT

The Double Benefit of Christ

R. Scott Clark



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Through most of the twentieth century, my grandparents worked in the heat of the Kansas sun in the hope that their children might one day have the leisure to become scholars.

This book is dedicated to them.

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FOREWORD

I am very pleased to commend this book in which Dr Clark enters into an important ongoing discussion, namely the relationship between Reformers within the same confessional tradition and also the relationship between those Reformers and their heirs. Having already done extensive work in this area, including editing a book with Dr Carl Trueman (*Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment*, Paternoster, Carlisle, 1999), in this work he contributes to an important discussion about how to assess the question of continuity and discontinuity as to doctrines, theological method, and historical contexts.

Since the 1940s and well into the 1980s with books such as R. T. Kendall's popular *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1648* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1979), the trend favoured the idea of discontinuity between Calvin and Calvinism, even to the point of seeing little relationship between those who claimed to be within the same confessional heritage. Reassessment began in the 1980s and through works like Dr Clark's, scholars and even the wider public have seen that some of the distinctions such as non-scholastic versus scholastic, humanist versus Aristotelian, and unilateral versus bilateral views of the covenant of grace often harbour simplistic dichotomies.

In the present book we find a thoughtful and reflective engagement with the original sources allowing the thought of Olevian to be seen in its own right as well as within the matrix of the other Reformers and even the catholic tradition. The book serves as a delightful symphony for the reader because the author allows for both discontinuity and continuity, while finding a harmony of concern from those within the Reformed expression of the catholic faith. Indeed, Olevian, a figure too often forgotten when considering the crucial thinkers involved in the sixteenth-century theological debates, comes alive within his historical milieu. The background of Olevian and the foreground of his own work in its particular setting helped shape the way he formulated his emphases within the Reformed confessional framework. This work reminds us of the necessity of viewing historical context as a

step toward understanding theologians of the past and their relation to other thinkers.

Dr Clark has placed Olevian not only within the streams of thought arising from the Reformation debates but within the broader catholic context as well. This is also highly important and significant because it serves as a reminder that the Reformers and their heirs did not see their work as a divorce from the previous 1400 years of Christian history but as an integral part of it. They believed themselves to be reforming the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church that arose from the apostolic preaching of the first century. Thus, Olevian and others like him always saw their work within this over-riding 'catholic' concern. Not only does such careful consideration provide a much needed reminder of the Reformers' desire but it also can aid in ecumenical discussions today, especially reminding those in the Reformed camp that their roots are not only 'reformational' but also 'catholic'.

I am pleased to be able to invite the reader into this book. I am sure the reader will find in it much upon which to reflect as well as a delightful read.

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Grove City College, Pennsylvania
April 2005

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Thanks are due to those who made this book possible. First of all to Barbara who endured her husband cloistered for an unreasonable number of years, and to Katie and Emily, who cannot remember when their father was not working on a book.

This research began as a doctoral thesis written under the supervision of the Reverend Doctor John E. Platt, Pembroke College, Oxford, who is a model of the scholarly virtues: industry, care and patience.

Thanks to all those who read and corrected the typescript in various stages of preparation including Carl R. Trueman, Paul R. Schaefer, Philip G. Ryken and Iain M. Duguid, and also to Brett Watson for his work on the index. Particular thanks are due to my colleagues W. Robert Godfrey, Stephen M. Baugh and Michael S. Horton and to Philip Henry, Gabriel Nave and Tom Wenger for their editorial help. Much gratitude is due to the editor of this series, David F. Wright, New College, Edinburgh, for his extraordinary labours on my behalf and to Lynn Quigley of Rutherford House for her gracious help. Any errors remaining, of course, are the author's sole responsibility.

Recognition is owed also to those institutions and libraries which supported this research, including Oxford University, St Anne's College, the Bodleian Library, Wheaton College, New Brunswick Theological Seminary and Westminster Seminary California.

Several families and individuals provided support for my research. Thanks especially to Mr and Mrs Robert L. Clark, Mr and Mrs Robert L. Northup, Mr and Mrs David Klaassen, Mr and Mrs Alan Mallory, Mr and Mrs Stephen Abery, Dr Thomas Martin and Mr and Mrs David Marsh for their generosity.

I am aware of a number of relevant volumes that have appeared since this work first went to the publisher. Of these, perhaps none is more significant than Philip Benedict, *Christ's Churches Purely Reformed: A Social History of Calvinism* (New Haven and London, 2002). This important work, however, does not affect the major conclusions of the present volume.

Finally, earlier versions of two chapters have appeared elsewhere. Part of chapter 3 of this book was first published as ‘The Authority of Reason in the Later Reformation: Scholasticism in Caspar Olevian and Antoine de La Faye’ in *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment*, ed. Carl R. Trueman and R. S. Clark (Carlisle, 1999). Part of the fourth chapter of this volume first appeared as ‘The Catholic-Calvinist Trinitarianism of Caspar Olevian’ in the *Westminster Theological Journal* 61 (1999), 15-39.

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Westminster Seminary California
April, 2005

INTRODUCTION

Caspar Olevian (1536–87) was a member of a distinctive *coetus*: the Heidelberg Calvinists, themselves part of a larger international society of theologians who were at work elaborating various themes in Calvin's theology according to their varied requirements. Olevian capitalised on theological concepts explicit and implicit in Calvin's theology such as trinity, covenant, predestination and double benefit (*duplex beneficium*) by which he unified his version of Calvinism, defended it against critics and taught it to students. There is no evidence in Olevian's own writings to support the contention that his theology was somehow a reaction to Calvinism. In fact, he taught all the elements of the Calvinist soteriology which critics found most objectionable: human depravity, the federal-forensic headship of Adam, double predestination, the prelapsarian covenant of works, limited atonement and conditions in the administration of the covenant of grace or the doctrine of sanctification. Olevian was therefore neither a reprobation (Barth) nor repudiation of Calvin (Heppe) but rather a developer of Calvinism. It is the reader's prerogative to decide according to his own lights whether Olevian's appropriation of Calvin remains useful.

Caspar Olevian was a trinitarian, Protestant, federal, Calvinist theologian. As a leader among the influential Heidelberg theologians in the last quarter of the century, Olevian was one of the more significant Reformed theologians of the era. He was a student of and well regarded by such luminaries as Theodore Beza and Peter Martyr Vermigli.¹

¹ In a letter of 12 March 1588 Beza wrote to Count Ludwig of Wittgenstein, 'Magnam in doctissimo et sincerae pietatis pleno theologo D. Oleviano beatae memoriae iacturam fecit ecclesia, istis praesertim temporibus, in quibus permulti sunt nomine re vero perpauca Theologi. Illius memoriae parentavi, ut et aliis maximis viris et mihi amicissimis, sicut ex versiculis quibusdam me is, si visum fuerit intelliges, quorum exemplar Gen. Domino Georgio mitto.' (G. Friedlander, ed. *Beiträge zur Reformationsgeschichte: Sammlung ungedruckter Briefe des Reuchlin, Beza und Bullinger, nebst einem Anhang zur Geschichte der Jesuiten* [Berlin, 1837], 167). (Peter Martyr Vermigli (1500–62) regarded Olevian as 'outstanding with respect to zeal' (egregium studium) possessing

In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, Olevian was considered a theologian, pastor, biblical scholar and one of the more outstanding Calvinist Reformers of the Palatinate. From the late seventeenth century, he came increasingly to be considered mainly in the light of his relations to the development of covenant or federal theology.

In the modern era, his importance for the development of covenant theology has been widely acknowledged. Heinrich Heppe, Karl Sudhoff, I. A. Dorner and T. M. Lindsay regarded Olevian as one of the primary sources of Reformed federalism.² Charles McCoy and J. Wayne Baker regard his covenant theology as of 'crucial' importance and originality.³ Mark W. Karlberg describes Olevian's *De substantia* (1585) as 'perhaps the most important and influential treatise on the covenant to appear in the sixteenth century'.⁴ J. F. G. Goeters declared that Olevian was the most important transmitter of 'genuine' Calvinism on German soil.⁵ Most recently, D. A. Weir has pointed to Olevian as one of the four essential figures in the rise of the 'prelapsarian covenant idea' central to Reformed federalism.⁶

In the modern period, Olevian has received occasional treatment in the secondary literature. He has been regarded consistently in the light of his relations to Calvin and his role in

'uncommonly good doctrine' (suam non vulgarem doctrinam) 'Peter Martyr to de Bèze, 4 October 1559', *Correspondence de Théodore de Bèze*, ed. H. Aubert et al. [Geneva, 1983], 25, no.151).

² K. Sudhoff, *C. Olevian und Z. Ursinus: Leben und ausgewählte Schriften der Vater und Begründer der reformierten Kirche* (Elberfeld, 1857), cited in L. D. Bierma, 'The Covenant Theology of Caspar Olevian', (Ph.D. Diss., Duke University, 1980), iii. See also Heinrich Heppe, *Geschichte des Pietismus und der Mystik in der Reformierten Kirche* (Leiden, 1879), 210; I. A. Dorner, *History of Protestant Theology*, trans. G. Robson and S. Taylor, 2 vols (Edinburgh, 1871), 2.36; T. M. Lindsay, 'The Covenant Theology', *British and Foreign Evangelical Review* 109 (1879), 531.

³ C. S. McCoy and J. W. Baker, *Fountainhead of Federalism: Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenantal Tradition* (Louisville, 1991), 38.

⁴ M. W. Karlberg, 'Reformed Interpretation of the Mosaic Covenant', *Westminster Theological Journal* 43 (1980), 19.

⁵ 'Handelt es sich bei der Person und der Theologie des Olevian doch um nichts weniger als um den wichtigsten Vertreter des genuinen Calvinismus auf deutschem Boden' (J. F. G. Goeters, 'Caspar Olevian als Theologe', *Monatshefte für Evangelische Kirchengeschichte des Rheinlandes* [Bonn, 1988/9], 287).

⁶ D. A. Weir, *The Origins of the Federal Theology in Sixteenth Century Reformation Thought* (Oxford, 1990), 36.

the development of Reformed covenant theology, e.g. Letham (1979), Karlberg (1980), Woolsey (1988), Weir (1990), Thomas (1997), Bierma (1997), Lillback (2001) and Van Asselt (2001).⁷ It is the goal of this work to carry on the project begun by Bierma, the recovery of the earlier view of Olevian, and through him, a historical notion of the development of early Reformed orthodoxy.

As a pastor, university professor, and seminary instructor Olevian encountered hundreds of students during his 26 year teaching career. Some of those students themselves became influential and helped to transmit his ideas to other places and times. For example, it is nearly certain that Olevian directly influenced the English Presbyterian Thomas Cartwright (1535–1603) and, indirectly, Dudley Fenner (c.1558–87).⁸ It was Olevian's covenant theology which was mediated to the founding professor of the University of Edinburgh, Robert Rollock (c.1555–99), via Robert Howie (c.1565–1645).⁹

⁷ R. W. A. Letham, 'Saving Faith and Assurance in Reformed Theology: Zwingly to the Synod of Dort', 2 vols (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Aberdeen, 1979); Mark W. Karlberg, 'The Mosaic Covenant and the Concept of Works in Reformed Hermeneutics: A Historical-Critical Analysis with Particular Attention to Early Covenant Eschatology', (Ph.D. Diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1980); A. A. Woolsey, 'Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought: A Study in the Reformed Tradition to the Westminster Assembly', 2 vols (Ph.D. Thesis, Glasgow University, 1988); D. A. Weir, *The Origins of the Federal Theology in Sixteenth Century Reformation Thought* (Oxford, 1990); G. M. Thomas, *The Extent of the Atonement: A Dilemma for Reformed Theology from Calvin to the Consensus* (Carlisle, 1997), 113–14; Lyle D. Bierma, *German Calvinism in the Confessional Age* (Grand Rapids, 1997); Peter A. Lillback, *The Binding of God: Calvin's Role in the Development of Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids, 2001); W. J. van Asselt, *The Federal Theology of Johannes Cocceius (1603–1669)*, trans. R. A. Blacketer (Leiden, 2001).

⁸ Weir, *Origins*, 118–19; P. Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (London, 1967), 152; Gustav Töpke records the name 'Thomas Cartirrightus' (ed., *Die Matrikel der Universität Heidelberg von 1386 bis 1662*, 7 vols [Heidelberg, 1886], 2.69, no. 8). On Cartwright in Heidelberg see A. F. S. Pearson, *Thomas Cartwright and Elizabethan Puritanism 1535–1603* (Cambridge, 1925), 131–55.

⁹ G. D. Henderson, *The Burning Bush: Studies in Scottish Church History*, (Edinburgh, 1957), 67–9; A. A. Woolsey, 'Unity and Continuity in Covenant Thought', 2.258, 75; J. K. Cameron, ed., *The Letters of John Johnstone c.1565–1611 and Robert Howie c.1565–1645* (Edinburgh, 1963), 273; W. I. A. Hazlett, s.v. 'Rollock, Robert (c.1555–1599)', *Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith*, ed. D. K. McKim (Edinburgh, 1992).

His influence as a theological writer was extensive in his own time and continues to the present. One can trace an intellectual connection to one of the chief formulators of the Reformed federal theology in the seventeenth century, Johannes Cocceius (1603–69), whose work influenced several generations of Reformed theologians and who himself claimed to be an heir of Olevian’s federal theology.¹⁰ In the twentieth century, Karl Barth made prominent use of Olevian as a sixteenth-century authority.¹¹ In his Göttingen lectures (1924–25), he looked to Olevian’s theology of the covenant as a forerunner of his own theology.¹² Later, in his *Church Dogmatics*, he said that in Olevian he could hear ‘the voice of Calvin’.¹³

International Calvinist Theologian

One important distinction between the first and second generations of the Reformation was the international character of the Calvinist Reformation. Olevian participated in the international propagation of Calvinism. Though Olevian produced much in the way of pamphlets and sermons during the 1560s as well as two popular books, *Firm Foundation* (*Vester Grund*) and *A Farmers’ Catechism* (*Bawren Katechismus*), he was known to Europe, England and Scotland as a theologian with a Latin voice. Thus, his Latin works, e.g. his logic and rhetoric

¹⁰ J. Cocceius, *Summa doctrina de foedere et testamento Dei* in *Opera theologica*, 8 vols (Amsterdam, 1673), 6:4; van Asselt, *Federal Theology*, 331, 340; C. S. McCoy, ‘The Covenant Theology of Johannes Cocceius’, (Ph.D. Diss., Yale University, 1956), 72, n. 3. The penetration or lack thereof, of Olevian’s theology into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is an area for further research. My preliminary investigations into eighteenth-century uses of Olevian and the fact that so likely a source as H. Bavinck, in the nineteenth century, made no references to him in his *Gerefomeerde Dogmatiek* (4 vols [Kampen, 1895]) suggest that Olevian may have become so closely identified with the origins of federal theology that he was not treated generally as a dogmatic theologian from the late seventeenth century until Heppé began to rehabilitate him by quoting him extensively in his *Die Dogmatik der evangelisch-reformierten Kirche* (Elberfeld, 1861).

¹¹ K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 13 vols, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh, 1956), 4/1.54–66.

¹² K. Barth, *The Göttingen Dogmatics: Instruction in the Christian Faith*, vol. 1, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, 1991), 303.

¹³ CD 4/1.59.

handbooks, his several biblical commentaries and two of his commentaries on the Apostles' Creed, were his most well-known and important publications and will therefore be the focus of this study.¹⁴

The Substance of the Covenant: The Double Benefit

Though we know Olevian primarily in relation to his role in the development of covenant theology, it is quite likely that he was known differently by his contemporaries and immediate successors. Judging by what was available in Thomas Bodley's library in 1605, Olevian would have been known not as a theologian of the covenant, but as a writer of handbooks on rhetoric, theological texts and commentaries on the Bible.¹⁵

With the publication of Lyle Bierma's excellent work, there should be little doubt about exactly what Olevian taught about the covenant.¹⁶ There remain, however, important unanswered questions about how, where and why he taught as he did. The

¹⁴ G. Goeters' exhaustive '*Bibliographia Oleviana*' illustrates this bifurcation in Olevian's publishing career. His publications in the 1560s were nearly all in German, reflecting his attempt to influence his local situation. After the 1576 'Relutheranisierung' of the Palatinate, his publications were almost exclusively Latin (K. Müller, 'Caspar Olevian – Reformator aus Leidenschaft Zum 400. Todestag am 15. März 1987', *Monatshefte für Evangelische Kirchengeschichte des Rheinlandes*, 37/38 [1988–89], 64, 320–37).

¹⁵ *The first printed catalogue of the Bodleian Library 1605, a facsimile: Catalogus librorum bibliothecae publicae quam ... Thomas Bodleius eques auratus in academia Oxoniensi nuper instituit* (Oxford, 1986).

¹⁶ Bierma's research focused on Olevian's *Vester Grund* (1567). See Caspar Olevian, *A Firm Foundation*, trans. and ed. L. D. Bierma (Grand Rapids, 1995) for a complete English translation of the first edition of *Vester Grund*. A critical edition of the 1590 edition has been published in, Caspar Olevian, *Der Gnadenbund Gottes 1590*, ed. G. Franz, J. F. G. Goeters, W. Holtmann (Bonn, 1994). K. Sudhoff, 'Sudhoff's Olevianus', *Mercersburg Quarterly Review* 8 (1856), 163–98, contains an English translation of the first part of *Vester Grund*. *Der Gnadenbund Gottes* (Herborn, 1590), of which *Vester Grund* is a part, should not be confused with *De Substantia foederis gratuiti inter Deum et electos* (Geneva, 1585). This mistake was made by J. Ney, O. Ritschl, and F. Klooster (See J. Ney, s.v. 'Olevianus, Kaspar', *Realencyclopädie für Protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, ed. A. Hauck [Leipzig, 1896–1909]; O. Ritschl, *Dogmengeschichte des Protestantismus*, 4 vols [Göttingen, 1926], 3.417–18; F. Klooster, 'The Heidelberg Catechism: Origin and History', [Calvin Theological Seminary, 1989], 341.) Cf. Bierma, 'Covenant Theology', 10, n. 2.

present work is concerned to fill in that outline with a survey of the system of Olevian's theology, which he described as 'the substance of the covenant of grace'. Therefore, this work will trace the details of his theological system through a series of chapters describing his doctrines of God, Christ, salvation and the Christian life. These *loci* were chosen because they constitute the bulk of his own theological interests and serve to illustrate the main lines of his theology. Considerable attention, however, is also paid to the social and intellectual setting in which Olevian developed and taught his federal theology.

The covenant was a tool for, not the sum of, Olevian's theology. For example, it was closely related to his trinitarian doctrine of God. This aspect of his theology has been ignored, yet his trinitarianism was as significant as any other aspect for the structure and substance of his theology. His federalism also unified his trinitarian doctrine of God with his Christology and that with his soteriology and those doctrines with his Calvinist doctrine of sanctification and the sacraments. The first three of these *loci* were among those which comprised the first part of the double benefit (*duplex beneficium*) and his doctrine of sanctification (renewal in the image of Christ) was the second part of the double benefit. Considered together, these *loci* comprised what he called 'the substance of the covenant' (*substantia foederis*).

These two expressions, 'substance of the covenant' (*substantia foederis*) and 'double benefit' (*duplex beneficium*) summarised his soteriology. Considered objectively, the substance of the covenant is comprised of God's saving acts in Christ and the explanation of those acts in Christian theology. Considered subjectively, it refers to the Christian's personal apprehension of Christ's benefits. This phrase, double benefit, describes the two things which Christ has earned for his elect: justification and sanctification. Like the 'substance of the covenant', the double benefit has both objective and subjective elements. Justification concerns Christ's work *for* the sinner and sanctification concerns Christ's work *in* the sinner.

Though he used the expression only occasionally, 'double benefit' was one of the more significant expressions in Olevian's theological vocabulary. It seems rather certain that it was a revision of one found in the first paragraph of Calvin's discussion of justification in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1559):

Christ was given to us by God's kindness to be apprehended and possessed by faith. By participation in him we receive chiefly a twofold grace (*duplex gratia*); namely that having been reconciled to God by his innocence we should have already in heaven a propitious Father instead of a judge; second that having been sanctified by his Spirit, we should pursue a life of innocence and purity.¹⁷

For 'twofold grace' Olevian substituted 'double benefit'.¹⁸ In every other respect, this quotation could have come directly from Olevian's pen.¹⁹ As it falls exactly in the middle of the *Institutes*, Olevian and his students in Herborn (c.1577–87) would have

¹⁷ 'Christum nobis Dei benignitate datum, fide a nobis apprehendi ac possideri, cujus participatione duplicem potissimum gratiam recipiamus; nempe ut ejus innocentia Deo reconciliati pro iudice jam propitium habeamus in coelis patrem: deinde ut ejus spiritu sanctificati innocentiam puritatemque vitae meditemur' (*Institutio Christianae Religionis* 1559, 3.11.1; *Joannis Calvini Opera Selecta*, ed. P. Barth and W. Niesel, 3rd edition, 5 vols [Munich, 1963–74], 4.182.4–8 (hereafter, *OS*).

The importance of the *duplex gratiae* for Calvin's theology has not always been well understood. In this regard the reader should consult the excellent work by Cornelis P. Venema, 'The Twofold Nature of the Gospel in Calvin's Theology: The *Duplex Gratia Dei* and the Interpretation of Calvin's Theology' (Ph.D. Diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 1985). Venema's conclusions about the nature and function of the *duplex gratia Dei* in Calvin's theology are quite similar to my conclusions about the nature and function of the *duplex beneficium* in Olevian's theology.

¹⁸ Henry Beveridge, in his 1845 edition of the *Institutes*, translated *duplex gratia* in 3.11.1 as 'twofold benefit'.

¹⁹ Calvin used the term *beneficium* with some frequency, sometimes to describe general benefits (*Institutio*, 1.2.1; *OS*, 3.35.3–4), but more typically to describe the benefits of redemption, e.g. *ibid.* 4.10.23 (*OS*, 5.186.3–5) where he spoke of the *beneficium* of Christ's blood. Peter Martyr (*Loci communes* [1576]) also used the term in both senses, but not the expression *duplex beneficium*. The expression does not seem to have captured the imagination of the rest of the tradition. For example, though Wollebius spoke of the 'vocationis beneficium' regarding the visible communion in the church and addressed justification and sanctification in ways almost identical to Olevian, he did not speak of the *duplex beneficium* (*idem*, *Compendium theologiae Christianae* [Oxford, 1655]), 132, 202–13. Nor does the expression occur in P. van Mastricht, *Theoretico-practica theologia* (Utrecht, 1699). Nevertheless, the idea was used by other late-sixteenth-century writers. See for example, William Perkins, *The Foundation of the Christian Religion Gathered into Six Principles* (1558) reprinted in William Perkins, *The Work of William Perkins* (Appleford, 1970), 159. The use of the *duplex beneficium* theme in seventeenth-century Reformed orthodoxy bears further research.

encountered this passage in the middle of the academic year in his course of lectures through the *Institutes*. It seems most likely that, as he lectured through the *Institutes* each year, the significance of this passage, with its distinction between and correlation of justification and sanctification as twin benefits of Christ, penetrated his own theology. Additionally Olevian's use of this construct is a good example of how Calvin's students related to their teacher. Not content simply to repeat Calvin's *ipsissima verba*, they elaborated and reshaped his theology to meet the requirements of their own schools and parishes.

Olevian distinguished consistently the objective from the subjective elements of the faith because he was a Protestant theologian. This fact has not been disputed nor has it been fully appreciated. His Calvinism has been, however, the subject of dispute since Heinrich Heppe positioned him as a sort of proto-Cocceian antidote to Calvinist predestinarian dogmatism. As a 'preacher to the Germans', he was committed to propagating the Protestant message of justification by imputed grace through apprehensive faith in Christ alone.

Olevian's intention as a Calvinist theologian in the Later Reformation or Early Orthodox period was to unite a Protestant, predestinarian soteriology with more recent developments in the Protestant doctrine of God, namely Melancthon and Calvin's trinitarianism, and those two topics with a Calvinist Christology.²⁰ He used the covenant to unify these topics with his Calvinist doctrine of sanctification and the sacraments.²¹

Method

Finally, a word is in order about the method of this book. It is the business of historical theology to discover in a responsible (i.e. historically critical and sensitive) fashion what a figure said as well as where and how he said it and most importantly, why.

²⁰ L. H. Zuck's comment that the 'Heidelberg approach sought to maintain continuity between the heart of Lutheranism and the heart of Calvinism' is equally true of Olevian (idem, 'Melancthonianism and Reformed Theology in the Late Sixteenth Century', *Controversy and Conciliation: The Reformation and the Palatinate 1559–1583*, ed. D. Visser [Allison Park, PA, 1986], 181).

²¹ He used three terms, *foedus*, *pactum* and *testamentum* synonymously.

Too many works of historical theology fail to answer these questions preferring to analyse theologians according to the author's own theological commitments. Such an approach invariably tells us more about the historian than about history. Such an approach also confuses dogmatic (or systematic) for historical theology. The latter is by nature descriptive not prescriptive. Its primary function is to provide the most accurate account of the past.

There is an approach to and version of the past on which interpreters from different backgrounds can agree. For example, Heiko Oberman, Richard Muller, G. R. Evans, David Steinmetz, Jill Raitt, Peter Stephens and David Bagchi have all written significant works helping us to interpret the theology of the sixteenth century from quite varied ecclesiastical, theological and institutional backgrounds. Yet, despite their varied situatedness, these authors, along with many others, have demonstrated an ability to illumine the past without allowing their personal theological convictions to overshadow it. Thus, it would seem that the work of writing history is not necessarily a war of competing agendas, but that, with all the attending hermeneutical and epistemological challenges, it is possible to tell something like the truth about the past.

I do not imagine that utter objectivity is a real possibility, or that historical theology is ever written without presuppositions or biases. Indeed, few books of interest are written by completely disinterested authors. My own interest in this topic was stimulated originally by the need to discover and examine critically my own theological heritage. Despite the potential dangers inherent in studying one's family tree, as it were, it is hoped that this work reflects faithful adherence to the principle of historical theology as a descriptive discipline.

According to this approach, then, Olevian's importance does not therefore lie primarily in what he has to say to us about our times or even about what one ought to believe, except perhaps inasmuch as one identifies with confessional Reformed theology, but rather in what he reveals to us about his own period, the nature of Reformed theology in the late sixteenth century and the way the story of Reformed theology has been told.

For these reasons, this book avoids making judgements about the correctness of Olevian's theology, choosing instead to consider his own history and times, in the hope that such a

method will ultimately shed more light on why Olevian, with others like him, taught as he did, which should allow scholars and teachers to make clearer judgements about the nature and rise of Reformed theology.