

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

PART OF THE THEOLOGICAL enterprise involves considering the work of those who have gone before, theological predecessors. This issue of the *Mid-America Journal of Theology* embarks upon that enterprise in focusing upon a diverse array of historical figures, among them Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575), John Calvin (1509-1564), B. B. Warfield (1851-1921), William Wijnand Heyns (1856-1933), Samuel Volbeda (1881-1953), and Karl Rahner (1904-1984). Among these above mentioned figures, the first two were renowned theologians and pastors of the Swiss Reformation, genuine fathers of the Reformed churches; the third mentioned individual was regarded not only as a champion of biblical orthodoxy within North American Christianity, he was an apologist for confessional Calvinism when Calvinism was no longer popular, and is generally considered the foremost academic theologian of American Presbyterianism. The fourth and fifth named persons have received little scholarly attention. They labored within American Dutch Calvinism, perhaps rather obscure personages for readers unfamiliar with that tradition, but offer a theological contribution that bears consideration. The last mentioned figure must be regarded as among the most important Roman Catholic theologians of the twentieth century; his work continues to be simultaneously debated and appreciated within the church and the wider theological academy.

The articles that follow in this issue examine certain features or contributions that these writers have set forth in their respective theological works.

As is well-known, Heinrich Bullinger was one of the preeminent Reformers of the sixteenth century. Laboring in Zürich, he took up Zwingli's mantle and produced a diverse assortment of theological writings, including his *Der Alt Gloube*, which functioned as an apology for the Reformation. Dr. Cornelis P. Venema, who has produced a treatise on Bullinger's doctrine of election, here offers an analysis of this document, demonstrating how Bullinger

answered the Roman Catholic charge that the reformation was an innovative movement. Bullinger's reply is simple: the Protestant Reformation isn't a novelty; rather, it is a movement of reclamation and recovery—that is, it is simply the old faith, the faith of the apostles and the early church. This essay is presented in commemoration of the five-hundredth anniversary of Bullinger's birth.

John Calvin's life and work are so well-known that no commentary is required here. Two aspects of his life and work, however, receive fresh reconsideration from Dr. Joel Beeke—the first on Calvin's piety, the second on Calvin's evangelism. From Calvin's diverse writings Beeke explores the shape and contours of the Genevan Reformer's understanding of Christian piety, arguing that Calvin accented the heart more than the head, though the two belong together. In his second article Beeke explores what Calvin had to say about evangelism—that is, bringing the gospel to those both inside and outside the church—and how he applied his own theology of evangelism to his labors within the city of Geneva, as well as in Europe at large and even overseas-mission outreach. Beeke makes a strong case that Calvin was more of an evangelist than he is usually portrayed, for he was a man zealous and passionate for the gospel.

Within the North American Reformed community there has been a lively disagreement regarding what constitutes a properly Reformed apologetic methodology. Of particular interest has been the divide between the so-called Amsterdam school of apologetics, first articulated by Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck, and then developed and refined by Cornelius Van Til (being identified in Van Til's hands as presuppositional apologetics), and what has come to be labeled the Old Princeton apologetic, most typified by the work of B. B. Warfield. This approach is sometimes regarded as a form of evidentialism or hard foundationalism. In his article on Warfield's approach to scholarship, including the Princeton theologian's work on apologetic methodology and practice, David Smith argues that Warfield's position has been misrepresented by presuppositionalists like Van Til, and that in fact his position may not be characterized as a form of rationalism or evidentialism. Instead, it is appropriately presuppositional in its theological convictions and application, which becomes manifest as Warfield sought to reason *rightly* against the forces of unbelief.

Another lively (*intramural*) disagreement within North American Reformed theology is the doctrine of the covenant and what precisely is promised to the recipients of the covenantal sign and seal of baptism. This question has long engaged theologians of the Dutch Reformed tradition—at least dating back to the writings of Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) and the theological controversies that erupted in the Reformed churches of the Netherlands at the turn of the twentieth century. These debates were soon transported to North America as well, and in some measure continue to this day. In the early part of the twentieth century, within the North America context, William Heyns, a professor at Calvin Theological Seminary, sought to define the doctrine of the covenant, particularly the divine promise signified and seal in the sacrament of baptism, in a way that would seriously reckon with the covenantal obligations that come to the recipients of baptism without minimizing the divine blessings assured therein. More specifically, Heyns' approach sought to address the strange situation that emerges when one who is baptized, receiving the sign and seal of the divine promise, fails to come to faith, or, in seemingly having come to faith, later falls away. Samuel Volbeda, Heyns' successor at Calvin seminary, was not convinced about the cogency or biblical validity of Heyns' formulation. The article by the undersigned examines Volbeda's assessment of Heyns' doctrine of covenant, reproducing *verbatim* a little known portion of Volbeda's course notes that treat this topic. I also offer an analysis and assessment of Volbeda's critique of Heyns.

Karl Rahner is probably best known for his prominent influence at the Second Vatican Council and his notorious and much maligned doctrine of "anonymous Christianity." His influence spans well beyond the Roman Catholic church and academy, for Rahner's theology has been quite influential in Protestant circles as well. A well-known feature of Rahner's theology, receiving much attention, is his *grundaxiom*: "The economic Trinity *is* the immanent Trinity, and vice versa." Although Rahner was not the first to offer this formula (Karl Barth offers something like it as well), it has come to be known as "Rahner's Rule." With the recent rebirth of interest in the doctrine of the Trinity, Rahner's rule has become ubiquitous in contemporary trinitarian discussions and formulations. But what precisely does Rahner mean by his axiom? What purpose does it serve? Why was it important for him? What is at stake if it is denied? Or, conversely, what is at stake if it is affirmed?

Every theology must confront the question concerning the relationship between God-in-revelation and God-in-eternity. In other words, inasmuch as God has revealed himself in the economy of salvation, may we conceive of God as somehow distinct within his own eternal divine life? Dr. Dennis W. Jowers offers a careful analysis of Rahner's axiom, arguing for the priority of divine revelation, exposing and refuting the weaknesses of Rahner's proposal, and demonstrating that a purely salvation-historical revelation of the Trinity, which Rahner's axiom entails, proves impossible.

Readers will also find, under a section entitled "Notationes" ("Things to be Noted"), a brief essay penned by the Rev. Bassam M. Madany. Madany's essay is a response to Bernard Lewis's allegation that Christianity and Islam share a rather sinister identity in that both are triumphalist religions. Madany argues that the Christian doctrine of Christ's victory and triumph, as Lord Almighty, Lord over all, is quite distinct and different than Islam's *notion of* and *approach to* its envisioned triumph.

—J. Mark Beach