

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

by J. Mark Beach

THIS ISSUE OF the *Mid-America Journal of Theology* features a wide range of articles, many of which are of a historical or confessional nature.

Less than twenty years ago, a widely held thesis among scholars was that the federal theology in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries arose in opposition to the scholastic methodology that was also emerging and gaining in popularity among the Reformed. Specifically, Jürgen Moltmann has set forth the thesis that covenant theology, like that of John Cameron, stood in opposition to classic Reformed predestinarianism as represented in the Canons of Dort, whereas Brian Armstrong proposed that Cameron's early federal theology stood in opposition to the legalism of the rising federal model. Dr. Richard Muller challenges these theses and argues that, in the emerging federalism of the early seventeenth century, Cameron's work did not stand in opposition to the trends of early Reformed orthodoxy but was instead representative of this budding movement among the Reformed.

Dr. Cornelis Venema offers a thorough historical and theological analysis of Article I/17 of the Canons of Dort, which addresses how godly parents ought to regard their covenant children who die in infancy. Venema carefully takes the reader through the discussions and various positions of or proposals by the delegates at the Dordrecht Synod and shows that the modern Baptist or Pietist position, which leaves believing parents in doubt, or without assurance, regarding their deceased infants is far

from the Reformed position and forfeits the biblical understanding of the covenant of grace. This essay is the most extended examination of this topic (relative to the *Canons*) in the English language. It will prove to be quite instructive and of practical benefit both for believing parents who have buried a covenant child at a tender age and for pastors who seek to counsel and minister to the bereaved.

Martin Luther has long held a respected place among the Reformed churches, even though he is not, strictly speaking, their own. Dr. Herman Selderhuis shows how the theological faculty at Heidelberg (1583-1622), prior to being taken over by the Lutherans, viewed Martin Luther as a principal and authoritative teacher for the Reformed churches. This historical journey particularly examines how the Heidelberg faculty of that period appealed to Luther in seeking to present and defend a right understanding of the Lord's Supper, and that against various Lutheran opponents. In this way, Selderhuis exhibits the way in which these theologians saw Luther and Melancthon in solidarity with one another, and how the Reformed tradition was never bound to the teaching of a single individual, but made use of the insights and breadth of the Christian tradition in seeking to arrive at the biblical position.

Inasmuch as the topic of covenant and baptism continues to generate a great deal of discussion nowadays within Reformed and Presbyterian churches, especially in connection with what has come to be known as the Federal Vision, it is useful to consider the writings and works of theologians from a former era that, either implicitly or explicitly, prove instructive for our times. With this goal in mind, I offer, in a revised translation, a treatise by Herman Witsius (1636-1708) on the efficacy and utility of baptism. This treatise demonstrates the diverse analysis the topic of baptism's efficacy received among Reformed theologians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, demonstrating as well key areas of consensus among them. This treatise sheds much needed light on this topic and, if nothing else, shows how Reformed theologians of the past have handled this difficult theological question.

Dr. Nelson Kloosterman writes on "The 'Redemptive-Movement Hermeneutic' and the Sufficiency of Scripture in Light of the History of Dogma." Among the perfections or attributes of Scripture historically confessed by the Christian church is the sufficiency of Scripture. After setting forth the scope and meaning of this attribute of Scripture, Kloosterman assesses the relationship between the "redemptive-movement" and/or "trajectory" hermeneutic of I. Howard Marshall, on the one hand, and the sufficiency of Scripture, on the other, in light of the church's confession of Scripture's sufficiency.

Under *Notationes*, Rev. Daniel Hyde presents a study of the work of the Holy Spirit in the Heidelberg Catechism. This essay should prove beneficial for catechism teachers as they seek to present an accurate understanding of the catechism to their students, and also for pastors who have the task to teach and preach the catechism.

Rev. J. Wesley White offers a thorough analysis of the phrase "Justification by Faith Alone," showing how each word in this locution received careful and precise definition by Reformed theologians over against a variety of opponents who muddled or compromised the biblical teaching of this doctrine. He then compares and evaluates Rev. Norman Shepherd's views on this phrase and demonstrates inadequacies and errors in Shepherd's understanding, some of which follow in the trajectory of errors by adversaries of the Reformed view.

A resurgent interest in Karl Barth's theology prompted me to present in this issue of the journal, besides the essay of Witsius, a short article on Barth's doctrine of revelation. This article seeks to discern what is positive and helpful in Barth's approach, and also to demonstrate where Barth's position remains problematic and falls short of the Scriptural witness.