

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

by J. Mark Beach

THE MANNER in which doctrine takes shape and gains ascendancy in any given theological tradition is something historians of doctrine are concerned to explore and explain. No tradition is completely static, for even in defending a tradition new challenges emerge or old disputes take on new dimensions that require new angles of defense or a fresh presentation of aged certainties. The Reformed tradition is no exception—it is marked by theological development and revision, as well as a confessional codification. Of course, not everything that defines a theological tradition is expressed in confessions and catechisms—think of liturgical practices. Nor are all theological doctrines that form part of a tradition contained in the confessions. A case in point is the doctrine of the *pactum salutis* or covenant of redemption—also called the counsel of peace. Although the suretyship of Christ finds expression in some of the Reformed confessional documents, the use of this idea comes short of a fully developed doctrine of the *pactum*. Inasmuch as this doctrine plays an important role in the federal theology that reached mature form in the seventeenth century among the Reformed, it has been the topic of scholarly exploration and debate, not only in connection with its rise or development but also pertaining to its biblical merits and theological implications. In this issue of the *Mid-America Journal of Theology*, Richard A. Muller advances the discussion surrounding this doctrine in his exploration of its origins among the Reformed. In a fascinating and careful examination of the original sources, Muller's article demonstrates how a network of issues brought forth the development of the *pactum*, including a cohesion of exegetical insights and conclusions, a set of polemical challenges, and a careful pondering of how doctrines impinge upon one another and even require analysis and explanation. Muller's essay also discredits the conclusions and/or approach of some recent scholarship that treats the sources anachronistically—indeed, an approach that is anachronistic methodologically, theologically, and exegetically.

Calvin's theology seems to generate continuing interest and debate on any given feature of his work. More recently there have been those who still want to "accommodate" Calvin to their cause, to put the great Genevan Reformer as the authoritative feather in their new theological cap. Calvin's ideas, however, are not compatible with the strange fire of doctrinal novelty. Delving deeply into Calvin's doctrine of the "twofold

grace of God" (*duplex gratia Dei*)—namely justification and regeneration (sanctification)—Cornelis P. Venema offers a thorough historical and theological analysis of Calvin's treatment of this issue within the polemical context of the sixteenth century, especially with reference to Roman Catholic opponents, along with a presentation of recent ecumenical discussion on justification. In doing this he is able to demonstrate the importance of Calvin's doctrine of the "twofold grace of God" for addressing current issues that form the ecumenical agenda on the doctrine of justification. Given the centrality of this doctrine within historic Protestantism, Venema's article shows how the church would be wise to learn from one of her most gifted teachers, for Calvin's understanding of the "twofold grace of God" clearly shows that salvation always brings forth in the believer the transformation of life which Roman Catholic theology is so concerned to emphasize. Nonetheless, the transformation of believers never becomes the basis of their acceptance before God; rather, Christ's work of salvation, through the Spirit's ministry, bonding believers to him in the way of faith, remains the only basis of their acceptance by God. Moreover, in being bonded to Christ they are, through the same Spirit, simultaneously renewed in Christ, for the Holy Spirit applies all of Christ's benefits to them.

The topic of covenant and election has been one item of debate between those identified with the Federal Vision (FV) and those adhering to the historic Reformed position expressed in its confessions. Inasmuch as certain ideas of Benne Holwerda (a minister in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands [Liberated], and also professor of Old Testament at Kampen [Broederweg] during the 1940s and '50s) have been appropriated by some proponents of the FV in their effort to articulate a more biblical approach to the meaning and relationship between covenant and election, it is timely that Holwerda's views are again the subject of scholarly analysis and scrutiny. In an article by Erik de Boer, here translated by Nelson D. Kloosterman, Holwerda's views on covenant and election are traced out, along with a careful analysis of how his views generated discussion and debate within his own theological/confessional/ecclesiastical tradition. De Boer shows how Holwerda's views were not simply accepted and codified, but were also subjected to critical analysis, even repudiation, by his theological heirs and kin. If nothing else, Holwerda's conception of election has had a hard time sailing peaceably alongside the Canons of Dort. In light of his study of Holwerda's doctrine of election and the disagreement it evoked in the subsequent history of the Liberated Reformed Churches, de Boer offers a set of conclusions as an agenda for further discussion. The translator of de Boer's essay also offers a helpful introduction to this article, as well as a cogent epilogue, which seeks to set up parameters for the debate surrounding this topic, particularly regarding biblical, confessional, and theological language relative to covenant and election. (Of course, North American Reformed churches that trace their lineage back to the Christian Reformed Church in North America have their own history to tell relative to the subject and controversies surrounding divine election, with G. C. Berkouwer's doc-

trine of election figuring prominently in the debates, along with names like H. Dekker, James Daane, and Harry Boer.)

Under the heading, "Symposium: Revisiting the Division of 1937—The Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Its American Ecclesiastical Context," readers will find in this issue of the journal a set of articles dealing with a particular facet of church history pertaining to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) and the split in its early years with the Bible Presbyterian Church (BPC). Here I mostly defer, referring readers to John Muether's "Introduction" to this symposium, which provides an explanation for its occasion and an introduction to its participants. In brief, readers will find here reprinted an article by George M. Marsden, first penned some forty-three years ago and published in the *Presbyterian Guardian*, followed by Marsden's own further reflections upon his original article, as well as responses by three Presbyterian historians: D. G. Hart, Alan D. Strange, and Peter J. Wallace, each bringing an interesting perspective on and distinct analysis of the 1937 split. Central questions include: Are there two distinct and incompatible traditions within North American Presbyterianism? Is the 1937 OPC/BPC split bigger than personalities or matters of Christian liberty, reprising the 1837 Old School/New School split? Or is the split between OPC and BPC better viewed along the lines of the 1741 Old Side/New Side division? Or are even the distinctions that were thought to pertain to Old School and New School themselves a myth? And can all of these various strands of American Presbyterianism rightly be denominated as "true" Presbyterianism? Such issues are explored in this set of articles.

Finally, prior to getting to the books reviewed in this issue of the journal, readers will find under *Homiletica et Homiliae* a sermon on Hosea 8:1-14. The task of preaching remains at the center of the church's calling, and so seminaries must place at the center of theological education the task of readying aspiring ministers for the pulpit and encouraging ordained ministers in this labor. As part of the desire to cultivate a fruitful pulpit ministry, I humbly offer this sermon, with the hope that sowing the gospel of this Old Testament prophet will reap the whirlwind of grace to bless and edify the church today. Let the Word of God be proclaimed! *Soli Deo Gloria.*