

EDITORIAL

Barth and Buzzard

In this issue of *A Journal from the Radical Reformation* we continue to address unbiblical tradition in the church, questioning such cherished issues as justification by faith alone and the Trinity. A formidable challenge has been proposed by Anthony Buzzard in his criticism of Barth's Christological foundation.

As appreciative as I am of the effort, however, and as much as I dislike the doctrine of anhypostasia, I must make a personal confession. I may remain unimpressed with many theologies and schools of thought within Christendom, but whenever I am faced with a theological giant like Karl Barth I can only stand in awe and put down my petty interpretative sling. Does this giant really have an Achilles' heel? Will one blow to his Chalcedonian forehead really bring him to his knees? My mentor Sir Anthony, whom I respect as much as any man (and more than most), believes so. I'm not sure. Maybe I'm just too impressionable, but when I look into the mirror of Barthian thinking I don't always like what I see. I look into the reflection of my own eyes and see the corrosive acid of postmodernism at work. I rue the fact that I seem unable to construct such a consistent and brilliant way of interpreting my reality.

We may not be satisfied with Barth's Christology, but many evangelicals feel uneasy about it too. For all his aspirations, can it honestly be said that Barth's Trinity is fully Chalcedonian? Barth functionalized the Trinity to such a degree in his thinking that some (perhaps less informed) Trinitarians still debate about whether they can count him among their number (the charge of "modalism" continues to be laid at his feet).

Nevertheless, perhaps a judgment against Chalcedon is also a judgment against the Barthian giant. If so then the biblical unitarian challenge is much greater than undermining the giant's exegetical foundation. "Doing theology" in the twentieth century means far more than picking away at biblical texts. Like Trinitarians we must move beyond the fourth century and tackle the challenge of developing a (forgive me) biblical unitarian philosophy or worldview. "Do you think for a moment that Wolfhart Pannenberg spent a single sentence dwelling on the scriptural foundation of the Trinity?" a friend once asked me. "Of course not. He simply assumed it and went from there."

In the pages of this journal we have spent a great deal of time dealing with scriptural arguments for and against the doctrine of the Trinity. Our reactionary posturing is fully justifiable in light of the way we have been consistently marginalized. Furthermore it has been necessary for us to answer the charges raised against us. But must Trinitarian “orthodoxy” always set the agenda? Sooner or later we must show the world how our unitarian doctrine of God plays out epistemologically.¹ We must not pretend for a moment that our theologizing work is finished. On the contrary, it has just begun.

Mark M. Mattison

¹ Perhaps the way has been pointed out for us in part by Mitchell Brown in “Jesus: Messiah Not God,” *A Journal from the Radical Reformation*, Summer 1993, Vol. 2, No. 4, 3-26.