

EDITORIAL

Welcome to the spring/summer issue of A JOURNAL FROM THE RADICAL REFORMATION. This journal was conceived as an attempt to present a theological understanding which gets short shrift from many. Its *raison d'être* is to represent views held by the “radicals” of the Reformation. These radicals were radical even to those who took their own stand against the theology of the Roman Catholic Church.

This third block of theology at the time of the Reformation was itself isolated, frozen out of the process and suffered persecution from both the Catholic Church and the Protestant Reformers. The latter insisted that these more thoroughgoing protesters went beyond the pale and lapsed into heresy.

Strangely enough those “heretical” opinions were not confronted with theological reasoning, at least from the Bible. Instead the opinions expressed by the radical reformers were often met with derision followed by violence. In retrospect, it seems that their opponents reacted out of fear — fear of being unable to substantiate their own position and fear of exposing the weakness of their own understanding.

Over and over again that “heretical” minority asked only to be shown where they were wrong in their understanding of the Bible. Too often they were answered not from the Bible, but from Greek and eastern philosophy, Platonic in origin. Alternatively they were curtly informed that the decisions of the early church councils must stand, even though they were clearly not apostolic but emerged from the second century onwards, culminating at Nicea in AD 325 and the ensuing conciliar decisions.

This policy perhaps led to the ultimately indefensible doctrine of papal infallibility, a patently fabricated teaching which brooked no dissent.

It is that unreasoning obstinacy which those who stood for the basic biblical principles found so objectionable. This journal seeks to address an injustice. Our views are substantially supported by current expert biblical opinion. Note these four standard reference works:

It is only with the fathers of the church in the third and fourth centuries, that a full-fledged theory of the Incarnation develops. Attempts to trace the origins still earlier to the Old Testament literature cannot be supported by historical-critical scholarship. The formal doctrine of the Trinity as it was defined by the great Church Councils of the fourth and fifth centuries is not to be found in the New Testament.¹

Today, however, scholars generally agree that there is no doctrine of the Trinity as such in either the Old Testament or the New Testament. It would go far beyond the intention and thought-forms of the Old Testament to suppose that a late-fourth-century or thirteenth-century Christian doctrine can be found there. Likewise, the New Testament does not contain an explicit doctrine of the Trinity.²

The doctrine of the Trinity did not form part of the apostles' preaching as this is reported in the N.T.³

The Trinity doctrine, the Catholic Faith is this: We worship one in trinity, but there is one person of the Father, another of the Son and another of the Holy Ghost – the Glory equal; the Majesty coeternal. The doctrine is not found in its fully developed form in the

¹ *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, Paul J. Achtemeier, ed., HarperOne, 1996.

² *The HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, Richard P. McBrien, ed., HarperSanFrancisco, 1995.

³ *Encyclopedia International*, 1982, 18:226.

Scriptures. Modern theology does not seek to find it in the O.T. At the time of the Reformation the Protestant Church took over the doctrine of the Trinity, without serious examination.⁴

It seems hardly warranted that the Trinity should be the cornerstone of orthodoxy. It is this unreasonableness that “radicals” down through the centuries have sought to challenge. The challenge continues in this journal’s mission: to ask for a clear and rational explanation of biblical texts that speak to this issue, and others of orthodoxy that also seem unsubstantiated by Scripture — doctrines such as the immortality of the soul, purely Platonic in origin, and heaven as the Christian’s final destination, which cannot be found in Scripture. That is our continued quest: to discover truth — God’s revealed truth.

In this issue you will be able to interact with Eugene Stilson’s investigation of the theology of the atonement. As President of Rock River Christian College, and former Academic Dean of Oregon Bible College, he brings to the arena a strong combination of historical and theological perspectives which enlighten this area of theology in its historical development.

A second article, more from a historical perspective, is from Arlen Rankin who has immersed himself in the Millerites’ theological developments as they collided with the embryonic age-to-come movement.

Also featured is a book review of James Dunn’s *Jesus Remembered* by associate editor Dustin Smith, a bright young theologian who will be coming to the fore in future editions of this journal.

Enjoy the journal and appreciate the invitation to honesty and openness.

⁴ *New International Encyclopedia*, Vol. 23, 47, 477.