

Neglected Voices in Theology

Editorial: Paul R. House

Paul R. House is Rogers Professor of Old Testament Interpretation at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He is the author, editor, or co-editor of eight volumes and several scholarly articles. His most recent publication is *Old Testament Theology* (InterVarsity Press, 1998). House's tenure as editor of *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* ends with this issue.

Introduction

Throughout Christian history there have been enduring voices that have never been stilled nor neglected. Individuals such as Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Arminius, and Wesley are heard and heeded generation after generation. On the other hand, some theological voices are treasured for a time, only to decrease in influence as time passes. Still others, such as Jonathan Edwards, Søren Kierkegaard, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, have been reclaimed after their deaths by theologians who found their ideas compelling and of continuing importance. Depending on one's point of view, certain reclaimed voices may or may not need to be heard, but the value of reclaiming voices can hardly be disputed. The value lies not only in regaining truths with which we agree, but also in learning to hear forgotten voices that have had pernicious influence on theology.

This issue of *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* focuses upon three neglected theological voices, those of Friedrich Schleiermacher, Crawford Howell Toy, and Adolf Schlatter. We do not highlight these individuals because all of them consider themselves to be evangelicals. Far from it, in fact. Rather, Schleiermacher and Toy are chosen because they are persons who have exerted influence that we neglect to our own theological peril. Schlatter, however, was an individual who stood for the truth in difficult circumstances. We need to pay attention to him because his neglected writings will enrich evangelical theology.

Thus, the goal of this issue of *SBJT* is to

warn and encourage. It warns that Schleiermacher and Toy still exert quiet influence that ought to be understood and addressed. It encourages readers to learn more about Schlatter and the influences mentioned in the Forum section of the journal. Perhaps the following brief introductions to these three figures will explain why they deserve closer scrutiny.

Friedrich Schleiermacher

Schleiermacher (1768-1834) was a pastor, writer, and academic theologian who stressed the importance of *feeling* in Christianity. Having rejected an orthodox view of scripture during university days, he sought ways to cling to Christianity. Partly based on his reading of Immanuel Kant, Schleiermacher concluded that religion consists chiefly of intuition and feelings that lead people to have a sense of and a desire for the infinite, which he broadly defined as God. He explained the number of world religions as being due to the variety of religious feelings possible in human beings. This emphasis on feeling as the essence of religion remains his most enduring legacy.

Greg Thornbury discusses Schleiermacher's thought in great detail. He also stresses Schleiermacher's ongoing influence. Thornbury rightly warns that a faith based on feelings rather than God's revealed word cannot endure. Evangelical Christians of all persuasions need to decide whether or not they will allow the scriptures to determine the validity of their experience.

Crawford Howell Toy

Toy was the first faculty member that the founders of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary added to their ranks. Serving from 1869-1879, Toy was a brilliant linguist. Sadly, he did not integrate theology and history in his hermeneutics. Eventually he believed one could hold to the religious feeling the Bible called for without believing in the historical reliability of the scriptures. In time he ceased to believe in the divinity of Christ, though that decision was reached after he resigned from Southern Seminary.

Interpreters must realize the weight of hermeneutics. One's method of interpretation will determine what one believes the text teaches. Thus, students of the word must strive to have a sound, intentional method of interpretation. Anything less leaves one's teaching and preaching, indeed one's faith, at risk.

Adolf Schlatter

One of the encouraging trends in academic publishing during the past several years has been the translation of Adolf Schlatter's writings into English. Schlatter (1852-1938) taught at Greifswald, Berlin. He published commentaries, popular books, and volumes on New Testament theology. Schlatter vigorously argued that biblical exegesis is the only sure foundation for Systematic Theology, that the New Testament is a reliable historical document, and that the church must preach and obey the Bible. Of course, he held these views during an era in which he was in the minority.

Schlatter demonstrated that a conservative approach to historiography and biblical interpretation is intellectually defensible. His convictional teaching under stressful circumstances is a model

for evangelical academicians. I am grateful that Robert Yarbrough and Andreas Köstenberger have given so much of their own time to making Schlatter's work available for the first time to English readers.

Conclusion and Personal Note

No doubt other long-stilled voices ought to be heard again as well. This issue seeks to be representative, not exhaustive. Still, if readers begin to consider these and other neglected voices, then the church will become wiser, stronger, and better able to hear the voice of God himself.

This is the last issue for which I have any editorial responsibility. The journal will now be in the capable hands of Tom Schreiner. I am grateful for the help I have received from the journal's editorial and advisory boards, and, even more, for the day-to-day aid given by Associate Editor Heather Oldfield and Assistant Editors Christi Sanders-Huskison, Kyle McClellan, and Richard Bailey. We have been blessed with good authors and a supportive constituency. For these and other kindnesses I am extremely grateful.