

Heretical Heroes, or Heroic Heretics

or Orthodox Heretics

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Introduction:

My special area of emphasis while at the Bible college became history, Church History, Church History and It's Theology, with a primary emphasis on the History of the Radicals of the Reformation.

It became seemingly obvious to me that what I considered our orthodox Biblical views were not consider orthodox by Orthodoxy. While in attendance at seminary, I was kindly, referred to as "the heretic."

It was clarified over dinner one night at a Professor's home, a Doctorate from Oxford, when in conversation, I posed the query to him, "Phil, how do you find justification in the Bible for the trinity?" His response struck me forcibly when he said, "Biblical scholarship is on your side," then added something to the effect that, "the Councils helped clarify the Bible's teachings."

It was impossible then to go much further in our discussions as my foundation based on the Bible was, for him and them, superseded by the Councils of Church History.

The search for truth has consistently been thwarted by appealing to the decisions of the Councils, especially Nicea, Chalcedon and then Trent. Follow this search for "truth" as we travel through Church History to seek those "Heroic Heretics."

Thoughts on Heresy and Orthodoxy:

Turning Orthodoxy to Heresy occurred over a relatively short period of time. This is even what Paul warned about, especially in Galatians 1 - "⁶*I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel;* ⁷*which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.* ⁸*But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!* ⁹*As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!* ¹⁰*For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God?"*

And Jude's admonition has become thematic, in our Theological Conferences, when he wrote: "³ *Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the ^lsaints.* ⁴ *For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.*"

But it happened as "heresy" came into the church from Greek philosophers, from Egypt and which we believed to be Biblical teaching or orthodoxy, was now being called 'heretical,' by those who moved from a Biblical understanding to their own heresy.

By virtue of an amalgamation of these theological sources, of which we were warned by both Paul and Jude with the political machinations of the Emperor Constantine soon they could compel and call their heresy orthodoxy, and the orthodoxy of Biblical truth now became 'heresy.'

1st Century to AD 325

This period of time is deserving of much more attention from us. We can be thankful that Sean Finnegan has done some outstanding work in this area.

Some of it has been published in three recent issues of the E-Herald of the Coming Kingdom. Because that periodical is posted with a link, they can be accessed in perpetuity.

He has also posted more on his own web-site

AD 325 - the Reformation AD 1517

From Nicea and Chalcedon the heretical orthodoxy became the law of the church, for a shorter period in the eastern part of the empire, and a for longer period in the western part of the empire.

Because western civilization dominates our own histories, the decline of truth we search to discover comes from what we now call western Europe, and even that of north Africa.

But by the late 600's Islam was making inroads on what had become orthodox Christianity, and Christianity began to disappear from first north Africa and then eastern Empire, and even Constantinople falls, and St. Sophia becomes a mosque.

Islam was coming across the Straits of Gibraltar, over-running the Iberian Peninsula until stopped in France at Tours by the armies of Charles Martel in AD 732. As a result

Islam was held largely at bay in Europe though it made some inroads up into what we know call Romania, evidenced especially in the city of Brasov.

Breaking Catholicism's Grip - 1517-1550

For the rest of western Europe Christendom reigned supreme with the close cooperation of "the" church, the Roman Catholic hierarchy and the political power of the Holy Roman Empire, which historian note was neither "Holy," certainly not "Roman," nor an "Empire" except in name.

This period, 1517-1550, around over 40 years broke the suffocating power of the "orthodox" Roman church.

Five parts, or 'fingers' are representative of the break-up of the monolithic Roman church.

1 - Luther - 1517 - 95 Theses on the church doors in Wittenberg which asked of the church, renewal, but especially regarding the selling of indulgences.

2 - Radicals - Jan. 21, 1525, often inappropriately called Anabaptist, which was but one of three parts of this section, as denoted by George Hunston Williams. Centered in Zurich and early associated with Zwingli, but who in fear fell away from them.

3 - 1532-1536 John Calvin in Geneva (remember Servetus) and also John Knox of Scotland and Presbyterianism

4 - 1534 Henry VIII in England whose split was political and financial, not theological, though the unwillingness of the reigning pope to grant Henry a divorce or annulment from his wife, who could not present the king with a male heir, and as she was from Spain and the aunt of the HRE, who was the pope's military support, it could not be allowed.

5 - The fifth part is the continuing Roman church, whose leaders in the 'Council' of Trent which lasted more than a decade, 1545-1563, re-emphasized all of the doctrines of the 'Church.' with no deviation and no recognition of the legitimacy of the 'protesting' church. It was the Counter-Reformation.

It was the search for truth that drove them, but unfortunately only part of the way which seems always to be the case. That search was soon disrupted by what happened at Munster. In 1534, there the Radical [Anabaptists](#) led by [John of Leiden](#), took power in the [Münster Rebellion](#) and founded a democratic proto-socialistic state. They claimed all property, took multiple wives, burned all books except the Bible, and called it the "New Jerusalem". John of Leiden believed he would lead the elect from Münster to capture the entire world and purify it of evil with the sword in preparation for the [Second Coming of Christ](#) and the [beginning of the Millennium](#). They went so far as to require all citizens to be naked as preparation for the Second Coming. However, the town was recaptured in 1535; the Anabaptists were tortured to death,

their corpses were exhibited in metal baskets (often confused with cages), which can still be seen hanging from the Tower of St. Lambert's steeple.^[4] This strongly colored the feelings of governing figures against any compromise with the Protestant movement's intent that would disrupt the societal norms.

Some Results:

With Luther, he early on flirted with unitarianism, and may have come to conditionalism, but in the end Lutheranism remained and held with: 1) trinitarianism, 2) heaven-going, 3) immortality of the soul and 4) infant baptism, as example.

With England, it might termed the English Catholic church, for with the exception of the Pope's headship, replaced by an Archbishop, under the King, doctrinally, they remained: 1) trinitarian, 2) heaven-going, 3) believers in immortality of the soul, and 4) infant baptism.

With the Reformed movement and the development of Calvinism, as espoused in his monumental work Institutes, the Reformed churches and Scotland's Presbyterian churches all remained: 1) trinitarian, 2) heaven-going, 3) immortality of the soul, and 4) infant baptism.

Obviously the Roman Catholic church, though challenged by these entirety of the Reformation, finally decided and remained: 1) trinitarian, 2) heaven-going, 3) immortality of the soul, and 4) infant baptism.

But in all these, especially the latter one there was a legitimate and genuine struggle of Searching for Truth, but in the first four briefly discussed there was little in the way of truth discovered as the effects of the Magisterium overwhelmed their weak intentions.

But in the Radical Reformation we do find those who were able to and willing to go where their search for truth would lead.

The First of Three would be those who followed Caspar Schwenkfeld von Ossig (1489-1561), who differed with Luther as to Communion, not accepting Luther's understanding of 'consubstantiation', but considered it a 'spiritual' matter, and with baptism, but alas their adult baptism was by sprinkling. He/they were also opposed to taking the Scriptures literally. They were forced from Europe and some few settled in southeastern Pennsylvania, where there were only some 5 churches and some 3000 members. They have since been somewhat incorporated into the United Church of Christ, so for them to be considered as part of the Radical Reformation has been essentially lost, as their unique understanding has slipped away.

Anabaptists, the Second and Third of the Three, differed as much from Luther as Luther did from Roman Catholicism.

While giving Luther his due, we do well to remember some historical realities. Luther, as well as Calvin and Zwingli, came to oppose harshly the Anabaptists. In fact, of the 20,000 to 40,000 Anabaptists martyred in the early decades, likely more were massacred by Protestants than by Catholics.

The differences between Anabaptists and the Reformers ran deep. Luther, Calvin and their associates wanted reformation of the medieval church. The Anabaptists wanted restoration of the New Testament church.

Second are those called the Anabaptists, a term that for years was used of the entirety of the Radical Reformation, until John Hunston Williams, in his seminal work, *The Radical Reformation*, reclassified them as but one part, albeit the largest, of the Radical Reformation. The era of the 16th-century Protestant Reformation in Europe spawned a number of radical reform groups, among them the Anabaptists. These Christians regarded the Bible as their only rule for faith and life. Because of their radical beliefs, the Anabaptists were persecuted by Protestants as well as by Roman Catholics.

Often equated as Mennonites, or Amish, the Anabaptist churches were separate and had no central organization and thus such lacks precision. But they hold to: 1) Adult, or Believer's Baptism, 2) the 'Mass' is but a Memorial service, 3) Free will, 4) Pacifism, 5) Secular laws and oaths were not considered legitimate, and 6) Congregational support for pastoral leadership (not from the government).

But it seems many of them follow 1) trinitarianism; 2) adult baptism by three immersions forward, and 3) and an obscure eschatology, if there is any at all.

Which leads to the Third representation of the Radical Reformation as identified by Williams, called the Evangelical Rationalists. While the Schwenckfelders and Anabaptist eventually ended up in America, it took the Evangelical Rationalist much longer to make that move.

They are to be traced as part of Zwingli in Europe, and Conrad Grebel, Georg Cajacob and Felix Manz can also be claimed by this branch. After their persecution, imprisonment and deaths within three years, the preaching of these three left small, independent groups, as with the Anabaptists over much of central Europe.

We next can connect with them in the Sozzini's, Laelius (1/29/1525-5/4/1562) and Fausto (12/5/1539-3/4/1604), an uncle and nephew from Italy. While the uncle was able to escape the Inquisition, it was clear Fausto needed to escape northern Italy and flee in time to Poland, where in came in contact with the Polish Brethren, who had already come to a somewhat unitarian understanding of God. This has been codified in the Racovian Catechism, or Confession.

It is likely that some of the text had been prepared by the Italian exile [Fausto Sozzini](#), who had settled among the Polish Brethren in 1579, without ever formally joining due to his unwillingness to submit to proper baptism, and who died in the year before the

Catechism was formally drafted. Despite his lack of any official status in the church Sozzini had been influential in bringing the Polish church round to a [Christology](#) which closely resembled what he had learnt from his uncle [Lelio Sozzini](#) in exile in Switzerland as a young man.

But Fausto was never able to join the Polish Brethren, refusing to be baptized as a believer. He died shortly before its publication in 1605.

Some Conclusions:

The search for truth has not come to a conclusive end, but remains on-going. It is found in the writings and witness of Francis David, John Biddle, Jacob Priestley and even Thomas Jefferson, some of which will be explored in my Sunday message.

Even these, and those previously written of, found some truth and stood for what they saw, though never attaining to that full measure of it. That remains for us, too. Perhaps we, too, have discoveries ahead for us.

The truth once delivered to the saints and which must be contended for, continues as an ongoing task, one which calls us to help in its discovery.

And the so the Struggle Continues.