



BIBLICAL HERITAGE REPORT & DISCOVERING THE BIBLE

Creating a better, happier and safer world through research & the distribution of factual information about our religious & spiritual histories!

<http://www.biblicalheritage.org>

Yesterday's Heresies – Today's Religions

By Jim Myers

A new form of Christianity came into being in the 16th century – **Lutheranism**. Shortly thereafter the **Reformation** added two other forms – **Calvinism** and **Anglicanism**. They all rejected the authority of the Rome Catholic Church and quickly established their own standards of orthodoxy and ecclesiastical structure in the areas in which they were located. *The problem was that these new standards and power structures were not in agreement, therefore arguments and numerous conflicts quickly followed.*

Martin Luther could have never guessed that the Reformation, once unleashed, could not be contained. With the assistance of the printing press, the Reformation made the Bible available to every person who could read or listen to his own language; it taught the supremacy of the Bible over hierarchies and theologies; and it offered the saving grace of God to every individual without the intervention of any church or religious officials. The new Christianities gave hope to every Christian, however illusionary, that he could serve as his own priest by finding Christ his own way.

Individuals read their Bibles in their own languages and reinterpreted its words in light of their personal knowledge and life experiences. They viewed the words in a number of ways – *mystically, literally, allegorically and rationally.* The inevitable outcome was the birth of many new schisms, sects and heresies. One of their dominant characteristics was that they came into being as a result of internal doctrinal conflicts.

Ultimately, two main streams of belief diverged from the officially sanctioned Protestant churches. One was **Arianism**, the other **Anabaptism**, both names imposed by their derisive enemies. **Arianism**, which later called itself **Socinianism**, and ultimately **Unitarianism**, referred loosely to any species of **anti-Trinitarianism**, and was named after the hated fourth-century heretic **Arius**. **Lutheranism, Calvinism, and Anglicanism followed the Nicene or the Athanasian Creed: “God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.”** Accordingly, Arianism was as deplorable to Protestant establishments of religion as to Rome.

Arians tended to be rationalistic in reading their Bible. They pointed out that the standards Christian creeds were not in the Bible, and that the injunction of Jesus to baptize in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit said nothing about the three persons of the Trinity sharing the same essence. Arians accepted Jesus as serving a divine office on behalf of God, but they denied his divinity or identity with God, believing that God was one and indivisible. Other Christians, even most Anabaptist, found this denial and the Arian rejection of the doctrine of the Trinity to be atheistic and blasphemous.

Only the Anabaptists were loathed as the Arians by other Christians. “Anabaptism” meant “rebaptism,” a term rejected by those to whom it was applied. Referring to themselves simply as “the Brethren” or by some other nondescript term, the Anabaptists disagreed on many points

and eventually split into several sects, although the name stuck to the bulk of them in the form of “Baptists.”

The Baptists believed that children, being in the state of innocence, would be received into the kingdom of heaven without baptism. Baptism was therefore reserved for persons of maturity who understood and accepted the Gospel. Such persons were regenerated by their faith before baptism. Infant baptism – a standard for Roman, Lutheran and almost all other forms of Christianity – rather than the baptism of believers, was to the Anabaptist an abomination invented by Rome to keep everyone within the fealty of the pope. *The Anabaptists taught that the Bible clearly stated that Jesus was baptized as an adult; he had commanded, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved” (Mark 16:16).*

Anabaptism, which spread faster than Arianism and attracted far more adherents, emerged in the 1520s in Central Europe. In Germany, a few atypical Anabaptists incited a class war in 1525, and others, in 1533, briefly captured the city of Munster to make it their New Jerusalem. However, the overwhelming number of Anabaptists were peaceable, righteous, hardworking, pious, and humble folk. They shared with other Protestants an abhorrence of Rome, its sacerdotal hierarchy, its administration of sacraments, its worship of relics, its veneration of Mary and the saints, and its worldliness and corruptions. *To Catholics, therefore, Anabaptists were revolutionary Protestant heretics.*

Protestant establishments regarded Anabaptists with fear and loathing too, although the Anabaptists sought to emulate the primitive church of the original apostles as they imagined them to have been. They were despised for their beliefs. They believed that no true Christian should serve state, which they considered a necessary evil administered by sinful men. They would not take any oaths, not even oaths of allegiance. As pacifists, they would not kill, approve of the death penalty, or serve in armies. They believed that the state had no religious duties; they refused to pay tithes or ecclesiastical

taxes for the support of established churches. For them, religion was a wholly private and voluntary affair. They wanted only to be left alone to worship as they pleased and live apart from the un-Christian world. Their apparent rejection of civil officers, courts, the military, taxes, and established churches made them seem as dangerous to Lutherans and Calvinists as to Catholics.

Usually, Catholics punished unrepentant Anabaptists as heretics and burned them alive. Protestant localities tried to avoid condemning them as heretics because heresy was a papist description for Calvinism and Lutheranism. Protestants preferred imprisonment, mutilation, and exile as punishments. They only executed when Anabaptism was compounded by sedition or blasphemy.

In 1530, a year after an imperial decree had capitally condemned Anabaptists, Martin Luther (1483-1546), once an advocate of religious toleration, endorsed the death penalty. He considered Anabaptists to be blasphemers, because they taught doctrines contradicting articles of faith believed by all Christians. He also believed that that anyone who taught that Christ is not God should be punished for blasphemy; likewise anyone who taught that Christ did not die for the sins of mankind, or that there was no resurrection of the dead, or that there was no heaven or hell. *All such people, Luther urged, should be condemned “out of hand.”*

The Protestant reformers were being killed by the Catholic Church as heretics, and Luther himself was called a heretic; so he tended to choke on the word “heretic.” But the word that came easily to him was “blasphemy,” as if it differed from “heresy.” It did not, especially as Luther used it. He used it indiscriminately to describe anything that he disliked or disagreed with, just as the church had used “heresy.” But, since he had written and preached for years about the futility and evil of punishing heresy, “blasphemy” became his verbal weapon of choice.

SOURCE: Blasphemy by Leonard Levy *BHC*

Your Help is Requested

You are invited to become part of the Biblical Heritage journey. BHC works to gather quality information from many sources and distribute it to as many people as possible. *Discovering our spiritual heritage is an exciting journey.* Many people know nothing about the history of the organizations and beliefs that have played a very important role in the lives of generations of “believers.”

This spiritual journey begins with one book for many of us – our Bible. It has a history too. Who wrote its words? Who decided what our “word of God” would be? In what language was it written? How can we most accurately understand its words and messages? How accurate are our English translations? Is there a way that I can learn to work with the original languages -- without going back to college -- so I will be able to check the work of the translators?

Information that will help answer the above questions, as well as many others, has already been gathered and deposited on the BHC website and written about in our newsletters. It is available without charge to the public. Obviously, it cost money to do our work. The money comes from the tax-deductible contributions of those who understand the importance of, and urgent need for, quality information. Only by having access to factual information are we able to test the accuracy of what we believe to be either true or false.

You are encouraged to make copies of the attached article and distribute or e-mail it to as many people as possible. You are also invited to help BHC by sending a tax-deductible gift today. *You investment in BHC’s work makes you an important member of the BHC team!*

(Cut Here)

Please make check or money orders to – **Biblical Heritage Center.**

___ I will keep BHC in my daily prayers.

___ Enclosed is my gift of \$ _____.

___ I will help BHC by sending a regular monthly contribution.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ ST _____ Zip _____

E-Mail Address _____

Print this form and mail it to: BHC – P. O. Box 79 – Cleburne, TX 76033-0079.
If you prefer to make an online donation -- go to <http://www.biblicalheritage.org> .