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### **Continuing Battle**

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-- *Commentaries from past newsletters* --

The atmosphere of St. Andrews Episcopal Church in Morehead City, NC was heavy with expectation. The nine o'clock service began with music productive of true worship. One knew that the Holy Spirit's power was rousing the hearts of the congregation. The sermon for the first Sunday of Lent was short and based on God's covenant with Noah. The Eucharist was served in traditional fashion, but the liturgy seemed to me to be more meaningful than it ever had before. The service concluded with the announcement of a congregational meeting after the service.

Everyone knew the subject of the meeting was the church's response to ongoing conflict with the bishop of the diocese over the authority of the scripture. This had come to a head when the bishop had announced he was going to ordain homosexual priests. It was not clear to me as to whether he had also planned to marry homosexual partners. The vestry had long debates as to a proper response and finally decided on a course of action. This meeting was to announce their decision.

As the meeting started a sheet with the words to a hymn was passed out. The words, written by J. R. Lowell in 1845, are a general hymn of the Episcopal Church. It reads as follows:

*Once to every man and nation  
Comes the moment to decide,  
In the strife of truth with falsehood,  
For the good or evil side;  
Some great cause, God's new Messiah  
Offering each the bloom or blight,  
And the choice goes by for ever  
Twixt that darkness and that light.*

*Then to side with truth is noble,  
When we share her wretched crust  
Ere her cause bring fame and profit  
And 'tis prosperous to be just;  
Then it is the brave man chooses,  
While the coward stands aside  
Till the multitude make virtue  
Of the faith they had denied.*

*By the light of burning martyrs  
Jesus bleeding feet I track,  
Toiling up new Calvaries ever  
With the cross that turns not back;  
New occasions teach new duties,  
Time makes ancient good uncouth;  
They must upward still and onward  
Who would keep abreast of truth.*

*Though the cause of evil prosper,  
Yet 'tis truth alone is strong  
Though her portion be the scaffold,  
And upon the throne be wrong  
Yet that scaffold sways the future,  
And, behind the dim unknown,  
Standeth God within the shadow  
Keeping watch above his own.*

The congregation sang it with great feeling. The rector gave a prayer asking for God's wisdom to be manifest in the meeting, and the proceedings were turned over to the senior warden. He began his discourse by giving the history of the controversy between the church and the diocesan bishop. He also announced that two new bishops had been ordained recently in Singapore by orthodox bishops from Africa and Asia. This came about because the Anglican Communion had disagreed strongly with the American Anglicans (Episcopal Church) over the issue of homosexuality. These new bishops had been assigned to the United States. They were to form a new church, the Anglican Church in America. He then announced that because this event had taken place and there was now a place of refuge, the vestry had made an unanimous decision to withdraw from the denomination and join the new denomination. This was done because of the "apostasy" of the council of bishops on a number of issues which were based on their denial of the authority and/or inerrancy of the scriptures. The major practical issue i.e., the evidence for this, was the bishops' intent to ordain homosexual priests.

The presentation took only 25 minutes. The senior warden then said they knew that a number of questions were in the minds of the congregation, so he was going to present the anticipated questions and answer them. This he did. He then told them the church was a theocracy not a democracy, but he was going to ask for affirmation of their action by the congregation. I was amazed when the entire congregation rose to their feet and clapped five minutes of their approval. I looked around to see if there were people who were not clapping and I only saw a few. Because there was considerable time left, the floor was opened for discussion. There were two somewhat hostile comments, but for the most part there were only questions that asked for clarification of points that demonstrated a lack of understanding in the minds of the questioners. Someone asked if the

bishop knew about the action. The senior warden said that he did not know the answer to the question, but he was certain that if the bishop did not know he would within five minutes of adjournment. The vestry then announced that they were available for further questions during the 11 o'clock service as the meeting was adjourned.

We emphasize that ". . . our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Eph. 6:12). Satan is hard at work. He chose a formidable weapon this time. He has made every effort to undermine the authority of the Bible by teaching that it is errant. He has exalted man's foolishness (this world's wisdom) above his Word. When Satan attacks, the forces for good have to counterattack. This is what happened at St. Andrews.

This meeting for me was not epochal in the history of the mainline churches. A large number of Presbyterian churches had left the PCUSA and the PCUS to join the PCA when the two former denominations merged. Again the issue was orthodoxy and the authority of scripture. The PCA is a highly orthodox Calvinist denomination, and was in existence when the churches withdrew. It clings to the dogma of the inerrancy of scripture. It is, however, true that the system of government of the Presbyterian churches made their withdrawal easy. The action is not easy in the Episcopal or Methodist denominations. They are what is called connectional denominations. The denomination owns the property, not the local congregation. Even so, it was an unusual action for a connectional church, for I knew of only one other Episcopal church that had taken a similar action.

After their action, I had one question in my mind about their declaration. I could not understand why they used the word apostasy to describe the action of the Council of Bishops and their own bishop. Apostasy is defined as the renunciation of religious faith. Apostasy is best exemplified in the actions of the Re-imagining Conference held several years ago in Minneapolis. There they worshiped Sophia, the Goddess of Wisdom. The action of the bishops was really a heresy. Heresy is defined as adherence to an opinion contrary to church dogma. It is, therefore, clear that their argument that the church has rejected the dogma of the inerrancy and authority of the scriptures is a heretical opinion. That the authority of the scriptures is a dogma is based on the two fundamental statements of Martin Luther. These were *sola fides* and *sola scriptura*. These two statements, meaning that only by faith can we be Christians and the only authority for the church is scripture, are foundational for all Protestants, and I think they are for Catholics since Vatican II.

Throughout the history of the church it has had to deal with heresies. The first one was Gnosticism. It arose during Christianity's formative period. There then followed Marcionism, Docetism, Pelagianism, Arianism and many others. Leonard George, in his book *The Encyclopedia of Heresies and Heretics*, does

not number the Christian heresies that have occurred, but they are numerous. I have listed only a few that are known to have arisen in the early years of the church's existence. George, a psychologist, thinks the church has always had evolving dogmatics. He feels that heresies throughout the ages have profoundly influenced the dogmatics of the church. The thing that has kept them as stable as they are has been the reaction of those in power who are resistant to change. According to George, heresies usually threaten the control or the economy of the church. Thus the reaction. I disagree with him, for the Bible is clear on most points where heresies have arisen. It certainly is on the subject of inerrancy.

Many of the heresies he describes are not related to interpretation of the scriptures. He lists Unitarianism as a heresy. It had its origins in the 1500's and is still a factor in our society today. It basically denies the Trinity so that it rejects a personal God. Most of them now reject God so they are apostate. The Unitarians have not been vigorously persecuted. Interestingly, they appeal to intellectuals because of their emphasis on reason, and have profoundly influenced American Protestantism. Arminianism was also called a heresy by George. Arminianism was a reaction to the Calvinist doctrine of "double destiny predestination" where a person is either elected or damned before the beginning of the world. They cannot choose. Arminius, however, believed that all persons could be saved, but they had a choice to make by their own free will. Although he was not persecuted to death, he did suffer for his beliefs. In general, Arminians were not vigorously persecuted. Now almost 40% of the Protestant Christians in the world are Arminian. The Anabaptists believed that infant baptism was not scriptural, and that believers' baptism was the correct form. Many were persecuted to death by both Protestants and Catholics. Even so, they thrived and now are the largest group of Protestants in the US.

Many of the heresies he describes have resulted in profound changes in the church. Methodism adopted Arminianism, while Baptist denominations grew out of the Anabaptist heresy. It is true that heresies have profoundly influenced the dogmatics of the modern church. In a like manner, they have profoundly influenced the vigor of denominations or individual churches. The Unitarians are distantly related to several of the early heresies, and have influenced American Protestantism. It is highly likely that the Unitarian's emphasis on reason influenced the United Methodist Church, United Church of Christ, the Disciples of Christ and the Episcopal church to increasingly deny the authority of scripture. This has resulted in the decline of these denominations today.

Harold Lindsell, in his epochal book *The Battle for the Bible* published by Zondervan in 1976, traced the history of the dogma of *sola scriptura* from Jesus' ministry to the present. He made a point that Jesus considered the scriptures inerrant. Peter, Paul and the early church fathers including Augustine never questioned their authority. Lindsell notes that the two most noted heresies did not relate to inerrancy. The Arian heresy had to do with the nature of Jesus and not with scripture, while the Pelagian heresy denied the dogma of original sin.

Augustine fought with them over the concept and won. The other heresies such as Gnosticism, and the others I have mentioned earlier never questioned the authority of scripture. It is, therefore, desirable to understand how the issue of inerrancy of the Bible came to America and why it is important for all Christians to understand its pernicious effect on the church in the Western world.

According to Lindsell, a man named Briggs was the first and most vocal proponent of historical criticism in the US. He had studied under A. I. Dorner, the professor of historical criticism at the University of Berlin. He introduced this hermeneutic at Union Theological Seminary in New York City in 1874. Even so, he did not go public with it until 1891 when he came out of the closet and in a fiery speech announced his belief that the Bible was useless as it was nothing but paper, and that the persons who wrote it were not inspired. Although he had openly confessed his heresy nothing was done about him, and he taught there until his death. The result of its introduction and his subsequent teaching was the gradual liberalization of the school. Until today it is looked on with scorn by evangelicals. His views were eagerly accepted by the students of that institution. Many of them went on to get graduate degrees and took positions in other seminaries where they infected them with errancy. Others, of course, went to Germany where they too were infected. The spread of this virus of heresy has infected almost every mainline theological school in the country. All of them, especially the Methodists, Presbyterians, United Church of Christ, and Episcopalians, are sick with it.

I have had personal experience to let me speak with some authority. I was once asked to speak at Dayton Theological Seminary. We conducted a conference on the Holy Spirit for the conference of the Methodist church in whose jurisdiction the seminary was located. Although it was well publicized on the campus, not a single student or faculty member attended the conference sessions. We did visit a dean and learned much about the institution. The most amazing thing we learned was that a student could graduate with a Master of Divinity degree and never have taken a course in Bible. The Bible was not considered of consequence in ministry.

In another experience, I sent the first student who took an elective with me in Christian medicine to attend the chaplain's training conferences in Duke Hospital. He was amazed when he heard a supervisor tell students that they should not pray with patients. He was even more amazed that the chief of the service called him into his office on his last day and told him that he did not believe that Jesus was the Son of God, he was only a great teacher. This man had learned his theology in a liberal seminary. It is obvious that he developed such views from professors who did not believe in the inerrancy and authority of the scriptures. After he made his announcement, he asked my student what he thought of his statement. When Jim said, "I will pray for you!" the chaplain did not "get it."

Whenever I have presented God's view of homosexuality in a public forum, I have been viciously attacked by some theologian in the crowd. This was especially true of my tenure on the curriculum resources committee of the Methodist church. During my first four years, the bishop assigned to the committee was the father of a homosexual and also one of the first Methodist bishops to ordain a homosexual minister. He was scathing in his denunciation of my biblical views. He explained them all away using historical critical views. I can go on, but my stories will be redundant so I will not relate them.

Eta Lineamann, in her book *Historical Criticism of the Bible*, harshly denounces this hermeneutical approach to the Bible. She was a student of Bultmann and Fuchs, two of the most vocal and revered of the historical criticism camp. She had developed a reputation of her own in the field until she came to know the Lord personally and was filled with the Holy Spirit. She then perceived the truth that she had not perceived before—the scriptures were inerrant and that historical criticism was man's wisdom—not God's. She does not make it plain that Satan is the great promoter of this heresy, but I believe he is.

Lindsell has pointed out that only one denomination had really addressed the issue of this heresy at the time he wrote his book. That denomination was the Missouri Synod of the Lutheran Church. They fought a big battle over biblical authority, and the evangelicals who believed the Bible to be inerrant won out. Long after the book was written, the Southern Baptists set out to deal with the heretics and purged their seminaries. Blood flowed and they were successful. To my knowledge all of their three major seminaries who are sponsored by them no longer have heretics on the faculties. Since one of them is in my backyard, I have had a front row seat to the purge in that seminary.

No other mainline denominations have attempted anything like the MS Lutherans and the Southern Baptists. At the present time the United (?) Methodists are wrestling with the issue of homosexuality, but even if the homosexual activists lose, it will not make a difference in the seminaries. It will be interesting to see what happens.

Why is inerrancy so important? The answer is to be found in 1 Corinthians in the 15th chapter. There in Paul's discourse on the resurrection he said, "But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins" (vss. 12-17). Since the historical critics deny the miracles in the Bible, and most often the resurrection, our faith is useless and we are still lost in our sins. They counter by

arguing we have no responsibility and therefore there is no sin, so why worry!  
God is dead!

I earlier commented that the seminaries got infected. I would like to close this discussion by explaining that statement. Years ago I read a book entitled *The Disease and Remedy of Sin*, by W. M. McKay a Cambridge theologian. In it he averred that we live in a morally corrupt environment. This corruption is infectious. J. B. Phillips said, " We are all more or less corrupted by the environment we live in." I think all we have to do is to look at the state of lives of people in the church today and realize that his statement is true. As one of my friends commented about a church he took over as pastor, "It was like Robinson Crusoe's goat pasture. The goats on the inside were as wild as the goats on the outside." The morality level of people in the church today is only minimally different from that of the pagans outside. This is true of pastors in the mainline denominations too. All have been infected.

Most of us who are true believers have little influence on the seminaries of this country. The administrative setup is such that those who work there are in control. They have allies outside in the American Association of University Professors. Since the administration and faculty are selected from other "prestigious" institutions where pagans (sic) are in control, it is unlikely that the seminaries can be cleaned up. The only answer is to establish independent seminaries where the inerrancy of the Bible is an unquestioned dogma. Interestingly the Episcopalians have such a seminary—it is Trinity Seminary near Pittsburgh. Until then an unending stream of seminarians will be graduated from standard seminaries who believe the Bible is errant. They will deny the divinity of Christ, the virgin birth, the resurrection, and the authority of God's laws and ordinances. I for one will not worship in a church where the pastor does not believe in inerrancy.

In the past, heretics were excommunicated, exiled, burned at the stake, hung, and executed in various other ways. Today they are exalted. It is true that God will take vengeance on them in time. The true church will continue to thrive even though it may be persecuted. It is time now for us to do what the hymn that was sung at St. Andrews says we must do.

*Then to side with truth is noble,  
When we share her wretched crust  
Ere her cause bring fame and profit  
And 'tis prosperous to be just;  
Then it is the brave man chooses,  
While the coward stands aside  
Till the multitude make virtue  
Of the faith they had denied.*

Can you choose like St. Andrews did?

