

EDITORIAL

In April, we had the pleasure of co-sponsoring the 17th annual Theological Conference in conjunction with Atlanta Bible College. This unique gathering draws from various strands of the Radical Reformation, especially from those with roots among the Evangelical Rationalists, particularly the anti-Trinitarians.

That term “Evangelical Rationalists” is accurate, but strangely dis-orienting. First, the “evangelicals” would not feel comfortable with the term’s usage among those questioning Trinitarianism, though most participants at this conference would feel quite comfortable with evangelicals’ moral stands, evangelistic impetus, and probably even many theological understandings. Alas, that seems to make no difference to evangelicals who would want to distance themselves from anti-Trinitarians.

Then the term “rationalist” to many implies Unitarian Universalist, which to many in the religious world means essentially without faith. So the label “Evangelical Rationalists” (George Huntston Williams) leads many astray in understanding the faith espoused by this Journal and those attending the Theological Conference. We would classify ourselves as deeply committed followers of and believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God. Ah, and there’s the rub!

Orthodoxy has great difficulty believing anyone showing anti-Trinitarian tendencies could possibly be “real” Christians. North Park Theological Seminary in Chicago kindly allowed me to go to school there, but there were, to me and the instructors, occasional amusing moments. One that stands out is when a student was making a point with which no one else in the class agreed. When I mentioned that I agreed with him his uneasiness prompted him to groan, “Oh no! Only the anti-Trinitarian agrees with me,” as if that doomed his argument.

But there is a much more serious side to the situation that we, through this Journal, seek to rectify: That is to establish that anti-Trinitarians have as deep and as valid a faith as any Christians, and have had to prove it through the centuries even to death. Servetus being martyred at the instigation of Calvin is the most well-known example. But there are many more examples of persecution and even death for this doctrine, as well as others of course.

Several years ago my wife and I traveled to Transylvania to visit, get to know and serve with the Unitarian Church in Transylvania. Three situations on that trip stand out in recounting the dangers of being not of orthodoxy’s persuasion.

We stayed with a church family in Romanian Transylvania. In a private conversation with the Unitarian Bishop over the churches there, I asked him about a strange situation that had come to light in the local church where we were situated. The pastor and his wife had recently had a baby and were intending to have him “baptized,” by which they meant sprinkled. I asked the bishop how this could be as historically believers’ baptism was a doctrine for which the church there had been willing to die. Somewhat embarrassedly he shrugged and replied that the Catholic Church would not allow them to continue as a church unless

they compromised on that issue. Not the government, even when Communism came in, but the Roman Church had forced that issue.

The second was when we traveled up into Poland with a part of our tour group to see the grave of Socinus, and the site of the Unitarian University in Raków. We walked through the small village, then up to the site where the university had been located. It was a grassy field then and had been for some time. The university building had been torn down many years before when the Jesuits came to power in Poland, after Sigismund's death, and they built a Catholic church in its place. The church was now gone too, and it was lonesome to walk the grounds down to the stream where so many had been properly baptized as they courageously took their stand of faith. The stream itself, where the baptisms took place, was small, and it was difficult to imagine the thousands who had sealed their belief there in the few short years the school was allowed to be in existence.

We had to get directions and travel outside the village to a private estate where Socinus' grave monument was located. The actual gravestone was gone as the Catholic church authorities, outraged by Socinus, encouraged the local populace to desecrate his grave. The stone was thrown into the river and was never recovered. A monument was later erected to honor Socinus for his work in establishing Unitarianism, though it then was a far cry from what is thought of as Unitarianism today. But it was with sadness that I stood and considered there at the monument the anger and even hatred toward this man and other men and women who would not and could not agree with the majority opinion, especially on the Trinity.

It was the third incident that caused me the most personal pain. Francis David had been the Calvinist Bishop to King Sigismund, but during that period his studies brought him first to question the personality of the Holy Spirit and later to deny the Trinity itself as having no biblical support. After Sigismund's death, David, at that time 69 years old, was arrested and finally taken to Deva. We climbed the mountain with the fortress on top. There we looked down into a cistern, some fifteen feet deep and with only stone walls and a stone floor. It was here that David spent the last months of his life, finally succumbing to exposure and coming to death simply because he didn't believe what orthodoxy told him he must believe.

Those incidents seem remote to today, but they are not. Though not facing the same persecution, those who deny the Trinity on academic and even rational grounds are shunned with strong animosity, charged with not even being Christians. I have to ask why we can't discuss this issue and together study it, along with other positions that seem unsubstantiated in Scripture.

That to us is the issue. Show us in the Bible support for those doctrines that now divide us. That is why this Journal continues to make its positions clear regarding God and His Son, conditional immortality, the Kingdom and the end-time eschatological issues. All we try to do is present our understanding of God's

Word in the hope that others will study the issues together with us and we can learn and grow up together in Christ.

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A Special Editorial Note:

In this issue we have three presenters to these pages — Sean Finnegan, Alex Hall and Dustin Smith — outstanding young scholars from whom we hope to continue to receive articles such as these.

Dustin is joining with Jeffrey Fletcher, who continues as Associate Editor of this Journal. We thank two who are stepping down now after several years of service — Scott Deane and Greg Demmitt. We want to thank them for their exemplary work through the years and wish them the best for their future.



GREG DEMMITT