

Hebraica Veritas - between the pursuit of authenticity and dogmatism

The discovery of the Hebraic foundation of the faith in YHWH, the Creator, the God of Avraham, Isaac and Yaakov, might best be described in terms of a journey. In addition to the journey metaphor we might add the element of treasure-seeking to better illustrate the nature of this pursuit.

Immediately upon accepting this metaphor as a way of describing the process of arriving at the final destination, it should become clear to most that just like in real life, not all people have the kind of interest that it takes for someone to embark on a treasure-seeking journey. Interest, curiosity and a even a sense of duty might best describe the true seeker of God's Truth.

A real treasure seeking journey involves a process of learning about the treasure, discovering an opportunity to embark on the actual journey, dedicating resources and going through preparation, and then finally making the journey.

But what has history taught us about human nature? Are most people hungry for knowledge? Do most people seek earnestly God's Truth and God Himself? Are most people ready and willing to go through the pain, the risk and the loss of resources it might cost them in order to discover a treasure?

We can ask these questions in a little different way using the treasure-seeking metaphor - how many treasure-seekers are there out there? Are most people you know involved in treasure-seeking? Are they spending hours and hours learning about something they deem incredibly valuable? Are they plotting a way to embark on a journey to acquire this valuable treasure? Are they willing to pay the price it will cost them to pursue such a plan?

We might also add these questions to the profile of a true seeker: are most people you know ready to give their lives for the truth they say they believe in? When asking this question I imply both giving your life in a sense of living your life in service of the truth you believe in as well potentially having to die for this truth. Both are equally important.

THE LIMITATIONS OF HUMAN NATURE

But what is the reality of human nature and what limitations come with it?

For 17th century British philosopher Thomas Hobbes **“the first and fundamental law of Nature“** is, **“to seek peace and follow it.”** (Leviathan, 1651)

Hobbes also has famously said:

“Life itself is but Motion, and can never be without Desire, nor without Fear, no more than without Sense.”

This seems to be true for most people. While we all have a sense of desire for more, we also have a sense of common sense and fear.

This explains why most people you know are busy working hard to secure for themselves peace, stability and the Utopian “problem-free” nirvana in life everyone strives for. Most people dream of going on getting a better paying jobs, going on vacations, enjoying life, creating something of value and profiting from it. They may secretly admire treasure-seekers but they have no intention on ever embarking on a journey involving a great cost, risk and uncertainty.

In my humble opinion it's of paramount importance to understand and accept the limitations of human nature - the way we as people think and operate. This isn't some condescending speculation or a put down. Understanding the limitations of human nature is critically important for anyone who wishes to help his fellow man. If we do not, our help might turn into a disaster.

Most people who claim to be believers are not too interested in a “treasure hunt”. In fact, it might be that many people become believers mostly driven by fears, rather than faith. Once their basic fears have been resolved and they have decided that they have found what they were looking for, their spiritual energy is spent mostly on maintaining the status quo. Simply put, most people rely on God as a way of seeking help for their problems and this is where their faith begins and ends. Such people may be fundamentally good people. Some of them might be not very good people at all. No one really knows where superstition ends and real faith begins. But at the end of the day human nature is a major limitation to what God can do on the earth - in the life of an individual or entire groups of people.

When it comes to the world of Christianity, seeking the authenticity of the faith is not what most believers are busy with (not to mention the leaders). Most believers, just like anyone else, are busy with taking care of themselves and their families, dealing with the challenges of life and seeking a better life. The founders of the United States, observing mankind and crafting laws that might best regulate and secure life and liberty, noted that the pursuit of happiness is truly what people embark on once they have been guarantee life and liberty.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. **The Declaration of Independence** July 4, 1776

Pursuing the authenticity of God's Truth is what spiritually and to some degree intellectually awake people get involved with. People who only care about the base things of life or those whose only goal is to check off the religious box of guilt on a weekly ritualistic manner, will probably find this material uninteresting and irrelevant.

For the rest of you, read on.

WHICH CHRISTIANITY IS MORE AUTHENTIC?

For ages most Christians have not been introduced to the faith in the right way. They might have been born in a family belonging to a particular denomination, or they might have come into the faith on their own but regardless of the scenario it is safe to say that most Christians have never been introduced to the faith correctly.

How do I know this?

These are my observations after 30 years of living in and ministry to believers in the Protestant wing of Christianity. By God's grace I have spoken to tens of thousands of people in over 40 countries - at churches, Bible Schools, conferences, seminars and evangelistic meetings. I have also prayed and ministered to literally thousands of people through the enabling of the Holy Spirit. I have heard the testimonies of hundreds of people who have told me how they came to my meetings and received a word, healing or deliverance. This is what God has called me to do and this is what I have been doing ever since I came to faith in 1989.

And even after going to Bible School, reading hundreds of books, researching and studying for thousands of hours, as well as communicating with some top-level ministers through the years, I always felt this Christianity I was part of, is missing something very important. In fact one of the first realizations I can identify in my conversion experience was the sense that the Christianity I'm reading about in the New Testament is not what Christianity looks like today. This led me to keep asking questions, to researching, reading and learning about how we have gotten to where we have gotten after 20 centuries.

As time went on I began to realize this isn't just some personal observation of mine. I realized there are many more people, much smarter than me, both dead and alive who have been bothered by these same questions.

The Bible School I went to considered itself to be a reformist type of a school, attempting to teach the Bible differently from how denomination were teaching it. Post-modernism has already eroded the foundation of whatever "classical" and "traditional" Christianity had been in the West for centuries. So now to be a reformist and to really understand what the Bible taught outside of the contamination of post-modernism, we were to look back at the teachings of the founders of Protestantism, the time of the Reformation of the Middle Ages.

Through the years I accumulated an impressive little library containing some of the works of Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, Huss and other preachers from that era. When the Internet era arrived and mankind began to get access to e-books and PDF files, I got my hands on even more works from authors who represented supposedly the most pristine source of interpretation of the Bible when it comes to Protestants. There are literally tens of thousands of Protestant denominations. Everyone thinks they have the real thing and that their interpretation is better than the interpretation of the group that they came from. In some cases this might even be true but in many cases it boils down to small differences and nuances of the similar beliefs.

I couldn't help but notice that much of the truths that were written during the Middle Ages came as a reaction to Catholicism. Obviously some of these truths answered the void in the hearts and minds of millions of people, mixed with various political passions and religious zeal and thus Protestantism was created. Above all, the end result of this process was the creation of national religious bodies who are not subject to Rome.

I am over-simplifying and painting this background with a broad brush so as to connect in the best way possible some important dots in this treasure hunt we have embarked on.

The next thing I began to learn about is that Protestantism, regardless of which version and which denomination we might take as an example, claimed to have solved some of the spiritual, theological and ecclesiastical problems of Catholicism but either failed to address many others or created a new set of its own. The Anabaptists (Protestants) in their pursuit of authentic faith rejected baptism of infants and began to practice full immersion in water. For this thing alone they were severely persecuted both by the Catholic Church and by Luther. Tens of thousands of Anabaptists were killed over the course of a persecution that lasted for centuries.

Anabaptism was made a capital crime. Prices were set on the heads of Anabaptists. To give them food and shelter was a made a crime. The duke of Bavaria, in 1527, gave orders that the imprisoned Anabaptists should be burned at the stake — unless they recanted, in which case they should be beheaded. In Catholic countries the Anabaptists, as a rule, were executed by burning at the stake; in Lutheran and Zwinglian states, Anabaptists were generally executed by beheading or drowning.

Thousands sealed their faith with their blood. When all efforts to halt the movement proved vain, the authorities resorted to desperate measures. Armed executioners and mounted soldiers were sent in companies through the land to hunt down the Anabaptists and kill them on the spot without trial or sentence. The old method of pronouncing sentence on each individual dissenter proved inadequate to exterminate this faith. It wasn't until 2010 that Lutherans issued an official **"Mennonites in Europe"** by John Horsch

It wasn't until 2010, some 500 years after the fact that [the official Lutheran church issued an apology to the Mennonites](<http://bit.ly/2N0ggjT>), the heirs of the Anabaptist movement.

Many other examples can be given for persecution of one Protestant group by another. This continues until today and even though no one is burning people to the stake or beheading anyone, the 'soft' persecution using religious politics is real.

If Protestantism represented a better, more simple and authentic version of Christianity, how come all these things have been happening for over 500 years now in the Protestant world?

CHURCHES AREN'T GOD

When I write about this church or another I don't want to leave the impression that I believe that if we somehow came to know the best and most accurate interpretation of Scripture, this will automatically create the perfect church on the earth.

Churches aren't God and they never will be.

When we talk about the pursuit of authenticity, it has to be clear that coming to understand correctly the true meaning of the teachings of the Torah for example is not enough to transform an individual or a group of people into flawless people. Sin has broken humanity and no amount of divine truth no matter how clearly spoken and presented will be able to create paradise on earth and turn us into perfect human beings.

However, coming to understand the essence of the authentic teachings of Moses in the Torah and the Messiah in the Gospel, can set us free from many religious burdens, foolishness and false beliefs. The correct understanding of who the Creator is and what He has taught us in the Torah can set us free to live normal and good lives, not lives marked by religious fanaticism.

Countless number of believers live sad lives burdened by belief systems and religious dogma. This is not the will of God. The closer we get to understanding the correct, authentic meaning of the teachings of the Torah and the New Testament, the more free we will be, the more life we will have and the more meaningful will our lives be.

We will talk about churches and what Hebraica Veritas might mean to the current ecclesiastical establishment.

DOGMA VS. LIFE

Historically Christian Hebraism has been understood as the use of Hebrew, rabbinic, or Cabbalistic sources for Christian religious purposes during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The use of such source material had dramatic results including the re-translation of the Old Testament, the re-interpretation of the New Testament, and the re-examination of historically central doctrines of Christianity.

Prof. Jerome Friedman *Kent State University*

Dogma in and of itself is not a bad word or a bad thing. It really means “doctrine” and “teaching”. All of us subscribe to some dogma. Even the people who refuse to submit to any [established, traditional] dogma, are in fact submitting to their own dogma which is...not to accept any dogma.

The reason dogma has a baggage is due to the fact that for many centuries the traditional churches (Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and later on Protestant) used their dogmas, their teachings as a means of “ruling” the masses. The Catholic mass as well as the Eastern Orthodox service were centred around serving the Eucharist and speaking some impossible to understand Latin phrases over the people, presumably to “bless” the people. In the Eastern Orthodox church the liturgy was carried out in old (church) Slavonic, which still happens in many places.

So dogma and the dogmatic became synonymous with giving people commands they are to respond to as if coming from God - even if they don't understand anything about these dogmas. Dogma is known for lack of flexibility, for harshness and often times for defying common sense.

No matter how much Hebraic Truth, or Hebraica Veritas we discover we can't use it to demonize those who don't “get it” and to create yet another movement that persecutes others or considers itself more elite than the rest.

Let's go back to what Prof. Jerome Friedman has to say about this:

The use of such source material had dramatic results including the re-translation of the Old Testament, the re-interpretation of the New Testament, and the re-examination of historically central doctrines of Christianity.

This is really the crux of the matter, the very kernel of what this treasure hunting journey is all about.

1. Re-translation 2. Re-interpretation 3. Re-examination

If and when we do the above, the rest of the process will unfold itself and we will implement whatever changes need to be implemented.

We can't get dogmatic about it, we can't demonize our opponents and critics, we can't use what we discover to boost our egos.

While confident in what we discover, we should always remain seeking, questioning and experimenting if we don't want to stagnate and become the next monument of former religious glory.

Whatever teachings have been given to us through Moshe (Moses) or through Yeshua (Jesus) and his apostles, hey have been given to us so that we can receive God's life and power in our lives and so can we can more effectively demonstrate His Kingdom on the Earth.

- Category [Hebraica Veritas](#)

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