



Orthodoxy and Heresy

It is commonly thought that orthodox teaching was firmly established by consensus in the early church, and that heresies arose as deviations from it. This picture has been demolished by Walter Bauer in his *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), which first appeared in Germany in 1934. In this magisterial study, Bauer shows that what was regarded as truth in one generation was sometimes considered inadequate in the next, and that what came to be held as orthodox was not always the majority view in early Christianity. Orthodoxy, as defined by church councils, triumphed relatively late.

Although the orthodox deserve our praises, heretics have been catalytic in the development of orthodoxy. Critical studies of today show that persons labeled heretics have raised issues that have called forth those necessary responses from the larger church which are now considered orthodox. In short, orthodoxy is more indebted to heresy than its formulations in fixed creeds, dogmas, and confessions may suggest.

Having said that, however, there are troubling aspects of heresies which emerge from time to time, including our own time. Some of these are discussed in this issue of the journal. *Timothy Lull* asks whether heresy is even possible today, and he says that it is. How then does one deal with it? He draws upon the works of recent theologians and goes on to make four suggestions for “heresy prevention.” *Robert Roth* provides insights into the nature of heresy in the New Testament era and then takes up and critiques six theological movements of our day which—however well intended—disturb the unity of the church. He leaves the question open whether they are actual heresies or whether they speak “partial truths” which “need not divide the church and may even help to reform it.” *Robert Wilken* contends that “orthodoxy has proven itself to be more durable than heresy.” After summarizing some of the contributions made by persons considered heretical, he goes on to discuss why the church united around certain practices, beliefs, and institutions which became recognized as orthodox. His analyses of discipline, ministry, and authority in early Christiani-

ty are particularly illuminating. *Martha Stortz* provides a fresh introduction to one of the best known figures to be branded as a heretic in antiquity, Pelagius. Drawing upon his exegetical works, she shows how profoundly biblical, and particularly Pauline, he actually was. She concludes with an assessment of both Pelagius and his main adversary, Augustine, highlighting the strengths of each. *Terry Thomas* discusses the hermeneutics of Luther—primarily from his lectures on Galatians (1535)—particularly his so-called “Christ against Scripture” principle. He shows what that principle meant in Luther’s understanding of the nature of Scripture and its use in theology and preaching. *Hemchand Gossai* takes up the question of the status of the Old Testament in the church and Christian theology. He reviews the attitudes of major figures

(Marcion, Delitzsch, Harnack, Schleiermacher, and Bultmann) concerning the Old Testament, and then makes a constructive statement in which the Old Testament is seen to be indispensable for theology, instruction, and preaching.

The “Face to Face” essays at the outset of the Resources section have been written by persons who served on the Commission for a New Lutheran Church and are bishops of the newly formed Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. *William Lazareth* and *Darold Beekmann* discuss, respectively, what has been achieved, and what remains to be seen, now that this church is under way. Next comes an article concerning the criterion for authentic knowledge of God obtained through Jesus Christ. That is an essay by *Wolfhart Pannenberg*, in which he discusses the “theology of the cross,” drawing upon the New Testament and the works of other modern theologians, and making an eloquent statement of his own, including a helpful discussion of the atonement. *Alvin Rueter* deals with ethical issues related to preaching—a subject seldom, if ever, taken up in homiletical literature—such as the preacher’s appeal to his or her hearers’ self-interest and the use of sources and illustrations in the sermon. The “Texts in Context” essay by *Paul Berge* discusses lessons from 1 John assigned in the lectionary for the Sundays of Easter.

A.J.H.