

Lecture 5-The Rule of Faith: Orthodoxy & Heresy

Church historians take seriously the fourth commandment: “Honor your father and mother.”

Dear friends, although I was very eager to write to you about the salvation we share, I felt I had to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.

Jude 3

Assigned Reading

The Story of Christianity—chapter 8, pp. 58-62

Key Terms

Heresy, Gnosticism, Marcionism, Montanism, orthodoxy

Objectives

- Identify some of the early heresies in the church
- Compare and contrast these early heresies to similar challenges to the Gospel today

Class Prayer

“Be gracious, O Instructor, to us Thy children, Father, Charioteer of Israel, Son and Father, both in One, O Lord. Grant to us who obey Thy precepts, that we may perfect the likeness of the image, and with all our power know Him who is the good God and not a harsh judge. And do Thou Thyself cause that all of us who have our conversation in Thy peace, who have been translated into Thy commonwealth, having sailed tranquilly over the billows of sin, may be wafted in calm by Thy Holy Spirit, by the ineffable wisdom, by night and day to the perfect day; and giving thanks may praise, and praising thank the Father and Son, Son and Father, the Son, Instructor and Teacher, with the Holy Spirit, all in One, in whom is all, for whom all is One, for whom is eternity, whose members we all are, whose glory the heavens are; for the all-good, all-lovely, all-wise, all-just One. To whom be glory both now and for ever. Amen.”

Clement of Alexandria

The Rule of Faith: Orthodoxy & Heresy

“The age of the martyrs has a powerful attraction even to the casual reader; the age of the heresies leaves him bewildered and distressed. Yet the agents in both were discharging an equally necessary function. Both were upholding the truth of the gospel; the one against the power of the world, the other against the wisdom of the world. The martyrs had this advantage, that the force of their testimony was concentrated in one supreme moment, was expressed in one heroic act, which commands universal sympathy. The controversialists had to live through a protracted struggle and are judged by their utterances, and all their human weaknesses which the conflict remorselessly revealed.”

Mandell Creighton, quoted by B. B. Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings* 2: 214

I. Which Came First—Orthodoxy or Heresy?

II. The Challenge of the Heresies

“The rejection of heretics brings into relief what your church holds and what sound doctrine maintains.

‘It was necessary for heresies to occur so that the approved may be made manifest’ (I Corinthians 11: 19) among the weak.”

Augustine, *Confessions* 7. 19 [25]

A. Gnosticism

1. Dangerous

2. Diverse and difficult
 3. Basic ideas
 - a. Dualism
 - b. Christ our “twin brother”
 - c. Salvation through secret _____ (“gnosis”)
 2. The Gospel of Thomas
 3. “The Gnostic empire strikes back” (New Age movement)
- B. Marcionism
1. Mixture of Christianity, Gnosticism and doceticism
 2. Marcion’s “Bible”—no Old Testament, 10 epistles of Paul, and a “purified” Gospel of Luke
- C. Montanism
1. Stress on the “extraordinary” works of the Holy Spirit (miracles and prophecies)
 2. Stress on the “end times”
 3. Stress on holiness and church discipline
 4. Why did Tertullian become a Montanist?
- III. The Task of Orthodoxy
- A. Stating the Faith
- “Christianity is not something utterly formless and vague, but has an ascertainable, storable content, which it is the business of the church to find out, to declare, to defend.”
James Orr, *The Progress of Dogma*, pp. 8, 9
- B. Maintaining the Mystery
- “The errors of heretics...force us to deal with unlawful matters, to scale perilous heights, to speak unutterable words, to trespass on forbidden ground, compelling us to err in daring to embody in human terms truths which ought to be hidden in the silent veneration of the heart.”
Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity* 2, 2

Questions for Consideration

1. From where did Montanism come?
2. What was the heresy of the Montanists?
3. Did the Gnostics refer to themselves by that term?
4. How does church history view Tertullian?
5. What is the relation between heresies and orthodoxy during this time?
6. Which of the church fathers addressed the decline of miracles and prophecy?
7. From where did the name of the Gospel of Thomas come?

For Further Study

Jones, Peter. *The Gnostic Empire Strikes Back*. 1992.

Shows how the gnostic heresy of self-deification has returned with a vengeance in the New Age Movement.

McGrath, Alister E. *The Genesis of Doctrine*. 1990.

A useful study of how Christian doctrine came into existence, by the prolific British historian-theologian.

Orr, James. *The Progress of Dogma*.

Famous work in which the 19th century Scottish theologian argues that “the history of dogma...is simply the system of theology spread out through the centuries.” pp. 21