

## *Heresy and the Pastoral Epistles*<sup>1</sup>

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### I

In antiquity, the term *haireisis* was not a negative concept - it meant quite simply a party or a school tradition, especially as applied to the different schools of philosophy.<sup>2</sup> Used like this, *haireisis* is a neutral or even a positive word, and Josephus applies it in this way to the different parties among the Jews.<sup>3</sup> It is also applied in this way in several instances by the author of Acts.<sup>4</sup>

There was, however, one aspect of Jewish and Christian self-understanding which implied negative connotations for the term. This aspect is the notion of the one, undivided people of God. Within the one people of God, a real people, there should be no parties or competing schools.<sup>5</sup> This holds true for the early Christian self-understanding, and in Paul we observe how *haireisis* and *schisma* are put together as terms describing the serious sin of destroying the unity of the body of Christ.<sup>6</sup> From this beginning, the term *haireisis* gradually developed into a *terminus technicus* for heresy, often used since the beginning of the second century.<sup>7</sup>

But of course the notion of false teaching and false practice is known to several authors who do not employ the term *haireisis*. They use other terms current in their milieu, like error (*plane*), false teachers (*pseudodidaskaloi*, 2 Pet. 2:1), foreign teaching (*heterodidaskalein*, 1 Tim. 1:3), false prophecy, blasphemy, etc. When I use the English term heresy, I mean this wider concept of false teaching, which only gradually came to be expressed by the Greek term *haireisis*.

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<sup>1</sup> Doctorate lecture, assigned theme, Oslo University, 7 May 1982. Only slightly revised.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. i.a. H. Schlier, art. *haireomai* etc., Th.DNT I, pp. 180-185.

<sup>3</sup> *Bell.* II:118f. (Loeb edn. p. 368); *Vit.* 10, 12, 191, 197 (Loeb edn. pp. 4, 6, 72, 74); *Ant.* XIII:171, 293 (Loeb edn. pp. 310, 374); XVIII:11 (Loeb edn. p. 8).

<sup>4</sup> Acts 5:17; 15:5; 26:5; cf. also 24:5,14; 28:22. Cf. W.C. van Unnik, 'Die Apostelgeschichte and die Häresien', *ZNW* 58 (1967), pp. 240-246.

<sup>5</sup> The resulting negative connotations seem to be present from the very beginning of the use of the Hebrew term *minim*: cf. i.a. G.F. Moore, *Judaism* III (Cambridge, Mass., 1962), pp. 68f.; Jacob Jocz, *The Jewish People and Jesus Christ* (3rd edn.; Grand Rapids, 1979), pp. 174-190.

<sup>6</sup> 1 Cor. 11:18f.; cf. Gal. 5:20; and M. Meinertz, 'Schisma und haireisis im Neuen Testament', *Biblische Zeitschrift* 1 (1957), pp. 114-118.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. esp. Ignatius, *Eph.* 6:2 (Loeb edn. p. 180); *Trall.* 6:1 (Loeb edn. pp. 216/218); Justin, *Dial.* 51:2 (emend. text, Goodspeed, pp. 150f.); and Joachim Rohde, 'Häresie and Schisma im Ersten Clemensbrief and in den Ignatius-Briefen', *Nov. Test.* 10 (1968), pp. 217-233; Marcel Simon, 'From Greek Haireisis to Christian Heresy', in W.R. Schoedel/R.L. Wilken (eds.), *Early Christian Literature and the Classical Intellectual Tradition. In Honorem Robert M. Grant* (Théologie Historique 54, Paris 1979), pp. 101-116 (repr. in M. Simon, *Le Christianisme antique et son contexte religieux. Scripta Varia* Vol. II, Tübingen, 1981, pp. 821-836).

## II

The text which has been chosen as the starting point for this article, 2 Timothy 2:18, certainly knows the concept of false teaching, even if it does not apply the term *haireisis*. The author comes close to this term, however, in Titus 3:10. There he speaks of a *hairetikos anthrōpos*, apparently meaning a man who establishes himself with a private doctrine and a group of followers, thus creating a faction within God's one people.

Let us take a closer look at 2 Timothy 2:14-26. We find that the warnings and admonitions given to Timothy are mainly concerned with the strategy to be followed in his dealing with the false teachers. Their doctrine is not reported, nor refuted. This accords with the advice given to Timothy: debate with the heretics should be avoided, it is of no use (14, 16f., 23).

The only glimpse we get of the doctrine of the heretics comes in verse 18. They apparently say that '[the] resurrection has already taken place'. Now, we would naturally like to ask two questions: (1) What is the meaning of that saying? and (2) What is heretical about it? Once we begin to ponder these questions, we find that the immediate context is of very little help - or at least so it seems. We therefore turn to a wider context, *viz.* the other anti-heretical passages in the Pastoral Epistles. The most important ones may be listed as follows:

- 1 Timothy 1:3-11; 4:1-7; 6:3-5, 20f.
- 2 Timothy 2:14-26; 3:1-9,13; 4:1-5
- Titus 1:10-16; 3:8f.

For the most part, these passages resemble our text in so far as they contain little if anything which further characterizes the teaching of the opponents. They consist of lengthy characterizations of the heretics as immoral, greedy, fond of strife, quarrelsome, not practising their own teaching, etc. Several commentators have followed the lead of M. Dibelius and H. Conzelmann<sup>8</sup> in recognizing this kind of polemic as quite conventional, especially in the polemics between the philosophical schools of antiquity. R.J. Karris<sup>9</sup> has given precision to this thesis by collecting numerous parallels especially from the philosophical polemic against the sophists. He speaks of a traditional polemical schema, and argues that these conventional charges yield no clue at all concerning the heresy in question. I shall provisionally accept that.

There remain, however, a few sayings which are not part of the traditional schema, and which actually seem to contain authentic scraps of the doctrine of the heretics. They may be listed as follows:

- 1 Timothy 1:4 'occupying themselves with *myths and endless genealogies...*'
- 1:7 'desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make assertions'

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<sup>8</sup> M. Dibelius, *Die Pastoralbriefe* (3. Aufl. nebearb. von H. Conzelmann, *Handbuch zum Neuen Testament* 13, Tübingen, 1955), pp. 14f., 52-54.

<sup>9</sup> 'The Background and Significance of the Polemic of the Pastoral Epistles', *JBL* 92 (1973), pp. 549-564.

- 4:3 'they forbid marriage and enjoin abstinence from foods'  
4:7 'godless and silly myths'  
4:8 (by implication): 'ascetics?'  
6:20 'Avoid the godless chatter and contradictions of what is *falsely called gnosis*'  
2 Timothy 2:18 '*The resurrection has already taken place*'  
Titus 1:10 'There are many insubordinate men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially  
*those of the circumcision*'  
1:14 '*Jewish myths ... commandments of men*'  
3:9 'stupid controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and *quarrels over the law*'.

If we try to synthesize these sayings, the following picture emerges: we have to do with Judaizing people, some of them circumcised, who claim to be expert interpreters of the law, mainly interested in genealogies and myths supposed to be contained therein. They forbid marriage, enjoin abstinence from certain foods, and in general seem to have advocated ascetic practices. Probably they had a negative attitude towards the created world in general. This would correspond to a purely spiritual conception of the resurrection, with no concern for the resurrection of the body. They could thus claim that the resurrection had already taken place - perhaps with reference to baptism. Most commentators conclude that the adversaries were Judaizing Christians with a Gnostic leaning, or gnosticizing Christians with a Judaizing tendency.<sup>10</sup> This would accord with the characterization in 1 Timothy 6:20: the teaching of the opponents falsely claims the name gnosis.

If we take this as a preliminary conclusion, we have in part answered the first question asked above concerning 2 Timothy 2:18: What is the meaning of the saying that the resurrection has already occurred? We have seen that the context of the Pastorals as a whole points to the conclusion that we have to do with gnosticizing opponents who despised the material aspect of creation, who had no use for a resurrection of the body, and who thus ended up with a one-sided stress on realized eschatology - or 'over-realized eschatology'.

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But our second question remains: Why did the author of the Pastorals deem this to be so utterly false that it merited no refutation? On what criteria did he condemn it as heresy?

In order to show that the answer to that question is not self-explanatory, let me briefly call to mind some passages in the recognized letters of Paul. Concerning marriage, Paul in 1 Corinthians 7 gives the advice 'not to seek marriage' (v. 27). Concerning restrictions on food, Paul is very lenient towards those who abstain from food offered to idols (1 Cor. 8), or food from

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<sup>10</sup> Cf. La. W. Lütgert, *Die Irrlehrer der Pastoralbriefe* (Beiträge zur Förderung Christlicher Theologie, 13:3, Gütersloh, 1909), *passim*, esp. pp. 91-93; Dibelius/Conzelmann, *op. cit.*, pp. 14f.; J.N.D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (Black's NT Commentaries, London, 1963), pp. 10-13; N. Brox, *Die Pastoralbriefe* (Regensburger Neues Testament 7:2, Regensburg, 1969), pp. 35f.; C. Spicq, *Saint Paul: Les épîtres pastorales* (Études Bibliques, Paris, 1969), I-II, pp. 85-119; Günter Haufe, 'Gnostische Irrlehre and ihre Abwehr in den Pastoralbriefen', in K. -W. Tröger (ed.), *Gnosis and Neues Testament* (Berlin, 1973), pp. 325-339; I.H. Marshall, 'Orthodoxy and heresy in earlier Christianity', *Themelios* 2 (1976), pp. 5-14, esp. p. 7.

animals in general (Rom. 14). Concerning the resurrection, Paul's baptismal theology might be seen to imply that the believer has risen with Christ in baptism (Rom. 6; Col. 2). Concerning the body, Paul had said that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 15:50). In other words: could not the heretics attacked in the Pastorals claim Paul's support for their doctrines? There is, in fact, a distinct possibility that they did so.<sup>11</sup>

No doubt the author of the Pastorals thought that his opponents had perverted the true Christian teaching, but the modern historian may hesitate in accepting that conclusion. From a modern point of view, would it not be better to say that we are facing two interpretations of Paul emphasizing different aspects of his theology - and, some would like to add, none of them representing the genuine, the real Paul?<sup>12</sup>

This of course makes the whole question of orthodoxy and heresy extremely complex and delicate, even if one only concentrates on the Pauline tradition within early Christianity. If we include the other dominant traditions - the Johannine, the 'school of Matthew', and so on - the complexity increases. Some would say that the very use of terms like orthodoxy and heresy within a first-century setting is hopelessly anachronistic. The concept of heresy implies the idea of deviation, distortion - in other words, it implies the idea that an original, authentic deposit of truth has later been perverted. But is this idea at all appropriate in the first-century context? Many would argue that the appropriate model is not one of an original deposit and later deviations, but rather one of different and originally independent lines of tradition, 'trajectories through early Christianity'.<sup>13</sup> The appropriate model would then be that some of these trajectories were able to merge and establish themselves as a dominant mainstream during the second century, emerging as orthodoxy and branding the other traditions as heresy.

The informed reader will know that I am now referring to the recent revival of what may be called the 'Bauer debate'.<sup>14</sup> Walter Bauer published his stimulating book on orthodoxy and

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<sup>11</sup> On Gnostic readings of Paul, and of Gnostics claiming Paul as their authority, cf. i.a. Elaine Pagels, "The mystery of the resurrection": A Gnostic reading of 1 Corinthians 15', *JBL* 93 (1974), pp. 276-288; *idem*, *The Gnostic Paul. Gnostic Exegesis of the Pauline Letters* (1975); and the wise cautions in A. Lindemann, *Paulus im ältesten Christentum. Das Bild des Apostels and die Reception der paulinischen Theologie in der frühchristlichen Literatur bis Marcion* (Beiträge zur hist. Theol. 58, Tübingen, 1979), pp. 297-343.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. e.g. the works by E. Pagels (see preceding note).

<sup>13</sup> Cf. esp. H. Koester/J.M. Robinson, *Entwicklungslinien durch die Welt des frühen Christentums* (Tübingen, 1971).

<sup>14</sup> A sample of contributions: Helmut Koester, 'Häretiker im Urchristentum als theologisches Problem', in E. Dinkler (ed.), *Zeit and Geschichte. Festschrift für R. Bultmann* (Tübingen, 1964), pp. 61-76; Hans Dieter Betz, 'Orthodoxy and Heresy in Primitive Christianity. Some critical remarks on Georg Strecker's republication of Walter Bauer's *Rechtgläubigkeit and Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum*', *Interpretation* 19 (1965), pp. 299-311; Hans-Dieter Altendorf, 'Zum Stichwort: Rechtgläubigkeit and Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum', *Zeitschr. f. Kirchengeschichte* 80 (1969), pp. 61-74; G. Clarke Chapman Jr., 'Some theological reflections on Walter Bauer's *Rechtgläubigkeit and Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum: A Review Article*', *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 7 (1970), pp. 564-574; B. Drewery, 'History and Doctrine: Heresy and Schism', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 23 (1972), pp. 251-266; A.I.C. Heron, 'The Interpretation of I Clement in Walter Bauer's "Rechtgläubigkeit and Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum"', *Ekklesiastikos Pharos* 55 (1973), pp. 517-545; H.J.W. Drijvers, 'Rechtgläubigkeit and Ketzerei im ältesten syrischen Christentum', *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 197 (1974), pp. 291-308; M. Elze, 'Häresie and Einheit der Kirche im 2. Jahrhundert', *Zeitschrift für Theologie and Kirche* 71 (1974), pp. 389-409; Robert A. Kraft, 'The Development of the Concept of "Orthodoxy" in Early Christianity', *Current Issues in Biblical and Patristic Interpretation (Festschrift M.C. Tenney)* (Grand Rapids, 1975), pp. 47-59; I.H. Marshall, 'Orthodoxy and heresy in

heresy in 1934, and was answered by H.E.W. Turner in 1954,<sup>15</sup> but the debate has gained new impetus in recent years by the republication of Bauer's book.<sup>16</sup> The recent publication of all the Nag Hammadi texts in translation<sup>17</sup> has added new aspects to the discussion.

If the present writer had any intention of saying something like the final word on this very complex set of problems, or even of providing the final solution, any such intention would prove beyond doubt that he were a very young man indeed, having succumbed to the 'youthful passions' against which our text warns. So I shall try something more modest.

### III

I shall ask a simple question: Is there some kind of common denominator in the first- and early second-century concept of heresy? I emphasize that I am asking about the meaning of heresy in this period. No doubt it is possible to define heresy in a quite formal and apparently timeless fashion, but then I doubt whether the definition is of much help when we pose the problem of heresy as a historical problem. One may reasonably argue that not only the classical heresiologists against whom Bauer directed his attack, but also Bauer himself tended to define heresy in such a formal way that the historical dynamics in the early controversies over right doctrine were lost sight of.

If we approach the concept of heresy from a historical point of view, I believe we are wise first to ask the question of background. The first Christians were - most of them - Jews, or Gentiles familiar with Judaism. What would their Jewish background mean to them with respect to the phenomenon of heresy?

We find in the relevant Jewish material a rich variety of terminology and concepts which is of interest in our present discussion.<sup>18</sup> But the most important point to notice in our context is the dominant position of the Torah. Apostasy and heresy - the two terms can hardly be sharply separated - are for the most part defined as theoretical or practical denial of the Torah, or something contained in the Torah. In rabbinic literature, the heretics, the *minim*, violate the Sabbath commandment, deny God's unity, believe in an independent divinity of evil, portray God as a cruel jester, deny the election of Israel, deny physical resurrection and the coming of the Messiah. In short, a *min* is a person who disregards the commandments of the Torah or denies some of its basic teachings, first and foremost those related to God's unity and his activity as creator and re-creator of this world.

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earlier Christianity', *Themelios* 2 (1976), pp. 5-14; F.W. Norris, 'Ignatius, Polycarp, and I Clement: Walter Bauer Reconsidered', *Vigiliae Christianae* 30 (1976), pp. 23-44; J.F. McCue, 'Orthodoxy and Heresy: Walter Bauer and the Valentinians', *Vigiliae Christianae* 33 (1979), pp. 118-130.

<sup>15</sup> *The Pattern of Christian Truth. A Study in the Relation between Orthodoxy and Heresy in the Early Church* (London, 1954).

<sup>16</sup> Walter Bauer, *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum* (Beiträge zur historischen Theologie 10), 2. Aufl. mit einem Nachtrag hrsg. von G. Strecker (Tübingen, 1964); American and English versions in 1971 and '72.

<sup>17</sup> James M. Robinson (ed.), *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (San Francisco, 1977).

<sup>18</sup> Cf. La. D.J. Silver, art. 'Heresy', *Encyclopaedia Judaica* Vol. 8, cols. 358-362; and the literature on *minim* listed in n. 5 above.

The rabbis had a special term for someone who denied that the one God of the Bible is the one and only creator of this world - they called such a person a *kofer ba-ikkar*, a denier of the root.<sup>19</sup> A parallel expression is 'a denier of Him who created him' (*kofer bemo shebaro*). In a Toseftah passage we read the following:

Once R. Reuben spent the Sabbath in Tiberias and a certain philosopher found him, and said to him: 'Who is hated in the world?' He replied: 'The one who denies Him who created him.' Said he to the Rabbi: 'How so?' He answered him: 'Honour thy father and thy mother; thou shalt not murder.... A man does not deny anything until he disavows the Root, and a man does not commit a transgression unless he first denies Him who enjoined us [not to do] it.' (Tos. Shev. 111:7).<sup>20</sup>

We first notice the juxtaposition of *denial of God as the creator* and *moral depravity* claimed by this text. Next we observe that R. Reuben in his reply stresses that the one hated is someone who denies Him who created them - not just God in general, but the creating God.<sup>21</sup>

Let me at once quote a roughly contemporary Christian text. It is the first Mandate of Hermas:

First of all believe that God is one, who made all things and perfected them....<sup>22</sup>

In Justin, perhaps ten years later, we find the following rendering of two important Jesus logia:

He convinced us that only God is to be worshipped, when He said: 'The greatest commandment is this: "Thou shalt adore the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve, with all thy heart, and with all thy strength, the Lord God who made thee", and when a certain man came to Him and said: 'Good Master', He replied: 'There is none good but God alone who made all things'.<sup>23</sup>

One may speculate that this non-synoptic addition of the creation concept is added by Justin as a polemic against Marcion, but that is hardly the only explanation, for we find antecedents to this peculiar rendering of the commandment to love God already in the *Didache*:

First love God who made thee, and secondly your neighbour as yourself.<sup>24</sup>

Let me add at this point a Christian text written about 100 years later than Hermas. It is a passage in the Syrian *Didascalia Apostolorum*, defining heresy:

[The heretics] all had one law, that they

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. esp. Ephraim E. Urbach, *The Sages. Their Concepts and Beliefs* I (Jerusalem, 1975), pp. 26-36, with references to primary sources.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted according to Urbach, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

<sup>21</sup> As E. Urbach points out in his comment on the passage, *loc. cit.*

<sup>22</sup> *Mand.* I:1; Loeb edn. p. 70.

<sup>23</sup> *1. Apol.* 16:6. Cf. the comments on this passage in A.J. Bellinzoni, *The Sayings of Jesus in the Writings of Justin Martyr (Suppl. to Nov. Test.* 17, Leiden, 1967), pp. 37-43.

<sup>24</sup> *Did.* 1:2; cf. similar-in Barn. 19:2.

- \* should not employ the Torah and the Prophets,
- \* and that they should blaspheme God Almighty,
- \* and should not believe in the resurrection.<sup>25</sup>

This is a strikingly Jewish definition of heresy, which can be placed beside the Mishnah's characterization of those who have no share in the life of the coming age: 'he that says that there is no resurrection from the dead prescribed in the Law, and [he that says] that the Law is not from Heaven, is an Epicurean'<sup>26</sup> (that is, one who does not care about God because he thinks God does not care about men).

If more evidence from the second century is needed, let me add that when Justin brands Marcion and the Gnostics as heretics, it is not because they deny Christ: they do not.

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They pretend to be Christians and confess the crucified Jesus as their Lord and Christ, [and yet they are not Christians, for they] blaspheme the Creator of the Universe, and the Messiah which he prophesied should come, and the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.<sup>27</sup>

The very identification mark of heresy is thus the *blasphemia creatoris*. In everything he says about Christian heretics, Justin expects to find approval from Trypho, the Jew. The corollary of this is that Justin never speaks about the Jews, or about Jewish Christians, as heretics - even if the Jews deny Christ, even if the Jewish Christians have a defective, adoptionist Christology. Justin uses strong and harsh terms about Jewish unbelief, but he does not apply the traditional terminology for heresy. The Jews may be guilty of blasphemy against Jesus,<sup>28</sup> but they are not guilty of the *blasphemia creatoris*, the hallmark of heresy.<sup>29</sup>

Let me pause here, and emphasize an implicit point in what I have stated so far. Perhaps the main reason why many scholars have refused to apply concepts like 'heresy' and 'orthodoxy' to the first or early second Christian centuries is the feeling - in itself entirely justified - that these two concepts presuppose a religion, a community that has 'come of age'. Time is needed before orthodoxy and heresy can crystallize, and also before a 'winner' can emerge, a winner who can define who the orthodox and the heretics are. What is overlooked is the fact that early Christianity to a very great extent was deeply rooted in a community that had indeed 'come of age', the Jewish community. The heretic was already an established category - and it is amazing to see to what extent this Jewish concept still determined the early Christian concept of heresy, even into the third century, as in the *Didascalia*. With this in mind, let us turn to some NT evidence and some early post-apostolic writings to see how the Jewish heresy concept is handled there.

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<sup>25</sup> *Didasc.* 23 (VI:10), quoted according to R. Hugh Connolly, *Didascalia Apostolorum* (Oxford, 1929 (=1969)), p. 202.

<sup>26</sup> *Sanhedrin* 10:1, Danby, p. 397.

<sup>27</sup> *Dial.* 35:2, 5. The last clause refers to their denial of the resurrection, as the parallel in *Dial.* 80:4 makes plain.

<sup>28</sup> *Dial.* 47:4; 93:4; 108:3; 117:3; 137:2.

<sup>29</sup> My point here is in part anticipated in A. Davids, 'Irrtum und Häresie', *Kairos*, N.S. 15 (1973), pp. 165-187.

## IV

The first thing which needs to be emphasized is the fact that the earliest Christians themselves soon came to be regarded as heretics by orthodox Jews, just as Jesus had been. Jesus, according to the gospel report, was found guilty of blasphemy against God because of the high claims he made for his own person, and during his career had to face the charge that he abolished the Torah. The first recorded Christian martyr, Stephen, was confronted with the charge that he had spoken 'blasphemous words against Moses and God' (Acts 6:11; *cf.* vv. 13f.). And according to Acts, a similar accusation was later levelled against Paul (Acts 21:21, 28).

I believe this is of some significance for our understanding of Paul's polemic in his letters to the Galatians and the Romans. His point of departure was not that the recipients of the letters were threatened by a traditional, well-known heresy, and that Paul could place his opponents in some well-known category of heresy. It was the other way round. By Jewish standards his opponents were perfectly orthodox - it was Paul himself who was charged with heresy, specifically antinomism. Paul, therefore, writes partly to defend himself, and when he comes to this defence, he cannot use any of the traditional models of heresy to combat his opponents, for they are not heretics by the usual Jewish standards. They embrace the Torah - at least, so it seems - and want all others to do so, including Gentile believers. And that is Paul's problem. If they were right, his entire mission to the Gentiles had been a failure, and his apostleship a misunderstanding. There was no Jewish - or Christian! - tradition which on this point could provide Paul with all the answers, and so he had to rely on the commission entrusted to him by the risen Christ outside Damascus, and to think through all the implications of God's revelation in Christ. While preaching a gospel without circumcision and without Jewish observance of the Torah to the Gentiles, Paul was very conscious of not being an anti-Torah preacher: 'Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? On the contrary, we uphold the law!' (Rom. 3:31).

From Acts and other early sources we get the impression that problems connected with circumcision and Torah observance were for a long time much debated; and while the majority within the primitive community in Jerusalem seem to have sided with Paul in his practical conclusions, not everyone would have been able to share all his theological premises. There gradually emerged a widely recognized consensus that Gentiles should not be subjected to circumcision and observance of the ritual elements of the Torah, although not all parties within Jewish Christianity were able to agree. But even among those who agreed, there seems to have been considerable variance with regard to the theological justification given for the common practical conclusions.

Again, let me emphasize the point I am trying to make here: in the process of defining itself in relation to Judaism and the Torah, the early church could make little use of the traditional heresy concepts within the Jewish tradition, for they were coping with a startlingly new problem, and it was they themselves rather than their opponents who could be described as heretics in the traditional way. And this continued to be so - we have seen already that a writer like Justin in the second century may call the Jews unbelievers and even worse names, but he never calls them heretics.



But now let us consider the other front on which the church had to define itself - the frontier between Christianity and Hellenistic/pagan life and practices. My thesis is that on this front the early Christians thought and reacted as good Jews, and made full use of the traditional Jewish heresy concept. If some who claimed to be Christians and believers in Jesus denied the essential goodness of the material creation, they were branded as heretics and described in the terms traditionally applied to antinomists and despisers of the Torah, that is, as immoral people - even if they were strict ascetics.

I believe perhaps the best illustration of this is to be found precisely in the anti-heretical polemic of the Pastorals, but before I come back to the texts from which I started, I should like to comment quite briefly on some earlier and later texts.

We begin in Paul. In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul argues, among other things, that the resurrection from the dead is an essential part of the drama which brings God's universal rule over the world to its fulfilment (vv. 20-28). They who deny the resurrection (of the body!) *do not know God* (v. 34). Notice that Paul says 'God', not 'Christ'.

In 2 Corinthians 4:4 Paul has a saying about unbelievers which, taken in isolation, is open to an entirely Gnostic interpretation: '*...the god of this world* has blinded the minds of unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the likeness of God.' If we take the 'god of this world' to be the creator God of the OT, and the God whose image Christ is to be the highest, unknown God, we have a perfect Gnostic or Marcionite saying. That is of course not Paul's meaning - for Paul the 'god of this world' is the devil, and nothing could be more abhorrent to him than identifying the God of the OT with the devil.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, it looks as if Paul himself had somehow felt the danger inherent in his language, for he goes on to add: 'For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness", -who has shone in our hearts to give the light of knowledge [gnosis!] of the glory of God in the face of Christ' (v. 6). Among other things, this is a perfect refutation of any Gnostic reading of Genesis 1- or of Paul!

It would be tempting to go through all the Pauline letters to look for similar examples, but this is not the place to do it. I also omit a treatment of the anti-heretical polemic in Jude and 2 Peter - with the remark that in those texts my thesis is most easily proved. The heretics are described as antinomists, ridiculing the doctrine of God's judgment and his creating the world anew. Besides, they are said to blaspheme angels - perhaps a reference to Gnostic doctrine about the inferior angels responsible for the creation of the world.<sup>31</sup> Instead, I shall comment on a kind of anti-heretical polemic which at first sight might seem to have another orientation, *viz.* the polemic against docetic Christology in Ignatius (partly paralleled in the letters of John). I should like to argue that docetic Christology is not primarily a christological, but rather a theological, heresy.

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<sup>30</sup> This point seems to me to be often overlooked by scholars who regard Gnosticism as a possible 'development' of Pauline theology.

<sup>31</sup> Or perhaps a reference to reviling of angels because of their mediatorship at the giving of the Torah. Cf. J.N.D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and of Jude* (Black's NT Commentaries, London, 1969), pp. 263f.

Basic to this position is the Greek dogma that God is *apathēes*, that he is entirely beyond any human emotions or affections, not to speak of suffering and death.<sup>32</sup> When Christian theologians later tried to reconcile this dogma with the OT and

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NT concept of God, they got into much trouble.<sup>33</sup> But it seems that the opponents of John and Ignatius evaded that trouble by letting the *apathēes* dogma have full play. Consequently, there could be no real contact between the divine and the material world - the incarnation was only apparent.

Ignatius reacts against this as if he were one of the Maccabean martyrs.<sup>34</sup> In fact, impending martyrdom is a significant setting for all Ignatius has to say about heresy. 'For I know and believe that he [Christ] was in the flesh even after the resurrection. And when he came to those with Peter he said to them: "Take, handle me and see that I am not a phantom without a body." And they immediately touched him and believed.... Therefore they despised even death...' (*Smyrn.* 3:1f.) - just like Ignatius himself. If the passion, death and resurrection of Christ was not a real flesh-and-blood event, Ignatius is going to sacrifice his own body in vain. The docetic heretics are those 'who neither the prophecies nor the Law of Moses persuaded, nor the Gospel even until now, *nor our own individual sufferings*' (*Smyrn.* 5:1). One should notice here the reference to the Law and the Prophets. They are mentioned as authoritative testimonies to the reality of the resurrection. Apparently the opponents were also interested in OT exegesis, but they refused to read the OT as a book foretelling the passion and resurrection of Christ (*Philad.* 8:2); instead, they seem to have specialized in some kind of gnosticizing exegesis which bolstered their docetic Christology. They were not circumcised Jews; they were rather Gentile Christians who had great difficulties in relating the OT faith in God's creation, and his direction of the history of salvation, to their own theology.

Ignatius - like the author of the letters of John - answers by putting great emphasis on the flesh-and-blood reality of the events enumerated in the christological summaries: Christ was truly born, he truly suffered, truly died, truly rose again. To insert this repeated *aléthos* in the christological 'creed' amounts to much the same thing as confessing in the first article of the 'creed', 'I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth'.

## V

Let me add a parenthesis at this point. I have several times spoken about the early heretics as representing Gnostic tendencies. This is rather customary in recent NT research, and the evidence which points in this direction seems so unambiguous that this terminology can hardly

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. esp. Werner Elert, *Der Ausgang der altkirchlichen Christologie* (Berlin, 1957), pp. 71-75; R.M. Grant, *The Early Christian Doctrine of God* (Charlottesville, 1966), Appendix II: 'The Impassibility of God', pp. 111-114.

<sup>33</sup> The monograph of Elert (see n. 32) treats this conflict as the main theme of Old Church Christology.

<sup>34</sup> On the Maccabean martyrs as model martyrs in early Christianity, cf. esp. W.H.C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids, 1981), pp. 19-22.

be avoided. It is easy to observe how heretical positions reconstructed from polemic in first-century documents can be directly confirmed in Gnostic documents from the second century onwards, and also in the reports on Gnostic doctrines by the anti-Gnostic Church Fathers. This of course makes one inclined to say that the Gnostic systems known from the second century should be thought to have already existed 100 years earlier. Some scholars have drawn that inference, and have regarded for example Paul's opponents in 1 Corinthians as fully fledged Gnostics.<sup>35</sup> But others have warned against this reading-back of second-century evidence, and rightly so.<sup>36</sup> Robert McLachlan Wilson has found a wide hearing for his suggestion that in the first century we should not speak of Gnosticism, but of Gnosis, meaning by the latter term ways of thinking which point the way to second-century Gnosticism, but which are not yet integrated into a Gnostic system.<sup>37</sup> But even if we accept Wilson's terminology, we are left with the question once asked by him: 'How Gnostic were the Corinthians?'<sup>38</sup> - or: How Gnostic were the Gnostics of the first century?

I submit a simple observation which may have some bearing on the issue. In the anti-Gnostic polemic from Justin onwards, the main point of attack is always the *blasphemia creatoris*, the claim that the God of the OT, the God of the Jews, who created the material universe, is a quite inferior deity, wicked or stupid or both. There can be no doubt that the horror exhibited by the Church Fathers when confronted with this doctrine was quite sincere, and that their violent protests came from the bottom of their hearts.

In writings prior to Justin I have found no similar direct attack on the *blasphemia creatoris*. I think that this silence is significant and allows for some conclusions. Had Paul met with opponents who claimed that the God of the OT was a wicked or stupid demiurge, I am sure he would have responded with an anathema sharper than the one in Galatians 1:8f. Nothing of the kind is found in Paul, nor in other writings from the apostolic or post-apostolic period. What we do find is polemic against something I should like to call *blasphemia creationis*. That there existed a way of thinking which could properly be characterized by this term is confirmed when we turn to the reports of the Church Fathers concerning the earliest forms of Gnostic heresy. In early Simonian Gnosis, it seems as if the God of the OT is still identified with the highest God, the Father. But he is not directly responsible for the creation of the material universe: it is made by lower angels (Iren., *Adv. Haer.*, 1:23:2). The same point of view recurs in Menander, who is also reported to have said that baptism conferred the resurrection and that the baptized should not die - a saying often quoted a propos of 2 Timothy 2:18 (*Adv. Haer.*, 1:23:5). Let me suggest that we may here have one of the criteria by which a more precise distinction between first-century Gnosis and second-century Gnosticism might be drawn.

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. the history of research recorded by E. Yamauchi, *Pre-Christian Gnosticism* (London, 1973).

<sup>36</sup> Cf. i.a. R.P. Casey, 'Gnosis, Gnosticism and the New Testament', *The Background of the New Testament and Its Eschatology. Studies in Honor of C.H. Dodd* (Cambridge, 1956), pp. 52-80; C.K. Barrett, 'Paul's Opponents in II Corinthians', *New Test. Stud.* 17 (1970/71), pp. 233-254; Sasagu Arai, 'Die Gegner des Paulus im 1. Korintherbrief and das Problem der Gnosis', *New Test. Stud.* 19 (1972/73), pp. 430-437.

<sup>37</sup> Robert McL. Wilson, *Gnosis and the New Testament* (1968) - I have used the German edition, *Gnosis and Neues Testament* (Stuttgart, 1971). Cf. esp. pp. 15ff.

<sup>38</sup> *New Test. Stud.* 19 (1972/73), pp. 65-74.

With this I conclude the parenthesis and return to a brief review of some anti-heretical motifs in the Pastorals. The reader will know my thesis: we are facing polemics which are mainly an adaptation of traditional Jewish polemics against deniers or despisers of the Torah and its main dogmas.

## VI

Let me first point out that the traditional schema of anti-sophist polemics which can be recognized in the Pastorals was used within Greek-speaking Judaism to attack those who opposed or denigrated the 'kingly highway' of the Torah. Many examples of this occur in Philo, as Karris has pointed out.<sup>39</sup>

Taking a closer look at some of the relevant passages in the Pastorals, we notice that the first of them (1 Tim. 1:3-11) is concerned precisely with the right interpretation of the law. The opponents do not read the law according to its true intention, which is ethical. They do not read it *nomimós*, lawfully, but rather seek to extract from it esoteric myths.

The next passage (4:1-8) is concerned with the ascetic precepts of the heretics. Their doctrine is said to derive from the deceitful spirits (*pneumas in planois*) and demons. This motif has no counterpart in the philosophical polemic against the sophists, but is at home in Jewish warnings against apostasy from the Torah, especially in the Qumran writings<sup>40</sup> and in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs. I quote a passage from the Testament of Asher (6:2f.): 'You shall hate the deceiving spirits [*ta pneumata tēs planēs*] who fight against man, but keep the Law of the Lord!'

The argument against the ascetical precepts of the opponents in 1 Timothy is drawn from the concept of the goodness of all that God has created: 'They enjoin abstinence from foods which God *created* to be received with thanksgiving<sup>41</sup> by those who believe and know the truth. For every thing created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, if it is received with thanksgiving' (43f.).

In 2 Timothy 3:8 the author recalls the two Egyptian magicians Jannes and Jambres as types of present heretics. They are known from the *Targum Ps. Jonathan*<sup>42</sup> and the Damascus Document. Here they are said to preach rebellion against the commandments given through Moses (CD V:17-21).

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<sup>39</sup> Karris, article quoted in n. 9 above, pp. 551ff.

<sup>40</sup> I.a. *Manual of Discipline*, IQS, III:18-22 (Lohse p. 10); *Damascus Doc.*, CD, IV:12-18 (Lohse pp. 72/74); V:18ff. (Lohse p. 76); XII:2ff. (Lohse p. 90).

<sup>41</sup> The point of this is sharpened when one has in mind the typical Jewish form of 'thanksgiving', the *berakah* formula: 'Blessed art Thou, O Lord, *creator* of the produce of the vine...' (quoted here from the Passover Haggadah, introductory *giddush*, but any random *beraka* has the same structure).

<sup>42</sup> And from later Midrashim, cf. the collection of material in Strack-Billerbeck *ad loc.*, III, pp. 660-664; and in L. Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia, 1968), II, pp. 334f.; V, p. 425.

In our pilot passage, 2 Timothy 2:14-26, we notice in verse 19 a quotation from Numbers 16:5 (LXX). If we could be sure that the author had the OT context in mind, it is of interest to notice that the Numbers passage is the story of Korah's rebellion, which according to the rabbis was directed against the Torah.<sup>43</sup> It would also be of interest to notice that according to the heresy passage in *Mishnah Sanhedrin* 10, Korah and his fellows are among those who have no share in the resurrection. But we can hardly be sure that this OT context is intended, so I shall not argue my point from this text.

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I shall rather make a brief comment on verse 22: 'Shun youthful passions (*neoterikas epithymias*)'. The commentaries I have consulted take this as a warning against passions in Timothy's heart (he was young!), and take the concept to be of a psychological nature: the passions due to young age. But as W. Metzger has pointed out in an article on this verse,<sup>44</sup> this sidetracks the argument in the context. Metzger argues, to my mind convincingly, that the *neoterikai epithymiai* signify the aspirations of the heretics, not Timothy's. But Metzger keeps the usual psychological understanding of the concept. However, in the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, I came across the following passage: 'Listen, my children, to what I learned... concerning the seven deceiving spirits (*pneumata tēs planēs*). Seven spirits are given (by Behar) who oppose men, and they are the instigators of the acts of rebellion (*ta erga ton neoterismou*)' (*Test. Reub.* 2:1f.). In the context, these *erga ton neoterismou* are clearly related to men of young age, but only with respect to their tendency to transgress against the Torah (2:9 and esp. 3:8). The essence of *neoterismos* is the illegitimate striving to make changes and innovations to the established order, in this case the commandments of the Torah. Similar connotations may attach to the term *neoterikai epithymiai* in 2 Timothy 2:22 also.

## VII

It is time to conclude. My thesis may briefly and somewhat pointedly be summarized as follows: according to the earliest definition, a Christian is a person who believes in Jesus as the Lord and Messiah promised by the God of the OT. If one does not confess Jesus as Christ and Lord, one is either a Jew or a Gentile, in either case a disbeliever, but not a heretic. A heretic is a person who confesses Christ as Lord, but denies the basic dogmas of OT revelation, first and foremost the belief in God's creation of the universe. The definition of heresy is essentially Jewish and to a great extent traditional. When the church had to define itself in the opposite direction - against Judaism - it could make little use of the traditional concept of heresy, and there was much debate on precisely how this line of demarcation should be drawn. On the other front, against heresy, we find no similar insecurity.

Let me add some final remarks. I get the impression that in rejecting the *blasphemia creationis* and, later, the *blasphemia creatoris*, the early church reacted very much on sheer instinct. The

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<sup>43</sup> Cf. Ginzberg, *op. cit.*, III, pp. 286-292.

<sup>44</sup> Wolfgang Metzger, 'Die *neōterikai epithymiai* in 2. Tim. 2,22', *Theologische Zeitschrift* 33 (1977), pp. 129-136.

NT writers had the basic OT dogmas deeply engrained in their very nerve system, and one is quite impressed to see how their later followers carried on this deep feeling of a basic continuity with OT salvation history. In those who committed the *blasphemia creationis et creatoris* one senses, on the other hand, a very fundamental discontinuity with respect to the Jewish origins of Christianity. In this sense, I think the concepts of orthodoxy and heresy may, after all, make good historical sense in a first- and early second-century context. It all amounts to something very simple and fundamental, *viz.* whether you affirm or deny the sentence 'I believe in God who created heaven and earth'. Or, if we should like a more explicit creed, we could quote the creed proposed by the author of the Syrian *Didascalia*. It is, in fact, a perfect summary of what the author of the Pastorals had to say against his opponents, and it may thus be a suitable conclusion of this article:

We have established... that you  
worship God Almighty  
and Jesus Christ  
and the Holy Spirit;  
that you employ the Holy Scriptures  
and believe in the resurrection of the dead,  
and that you make use of all His creatures with  
thanksgiving;  
and that men should marry.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> *Didasc.* 24 (VI:12); Connolly p. 204 (see n. 25 above).

The Pastoral epistles, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy and Titus, are unlikely on linguistic and historical grounds to be by Paul. (See the discussions at the links above for more details and resources on the authorship question.)<sup>1</sup> There are linguistic similarities across the Pastorals, the writings of Ignatius and the epistle of Polycarp that can be seen as pointing to the following: The Pastorals were born in the same cultural tradition as the writings of Ignatius and Polycarp. The possibility even that the Pastorals were written by Polycarp or "Luke" (a) the heresy is one with a different interpretation of Paul, and one that is not yet taking over the Ephesian church; (b) the struggle is nevertheless tense: the danger is near Ephesus (cf. Acts of John, 30) since Paul has to return there soon. The pastoral epistles are those letters written by Paul to Timothy and Titus in the New Testament. So, they are 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus. They are called pastoral because they are letters with instructions for pastors, congregations, and general functions within the church.<sup>2</sup> So, they are 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus. They are called pastoral because they are letters with instructions for pastors, congregations, and general functions within the church. First Timothy deals primarily with church worship and organization. It deals with the issue of women in relationship to authority (1 Tim. 2:9-15) and dignity (1 Tim. 3:11), speaks of overseers (bishops, 1 Tim.