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# Paul prays for the church

John R W Stott

Dr Markus Barth, who finds Ephesians so puzzling that he depicts it as 'a stranger at the door', nevertheless confesses that this stranger gains the right to enter 'because its readers have a place in the intercession of the author' (*The Broken Wall*, Collins, 1960, pp. 23, 24).

Certainly Paul begins and ends the doctrinal section of his letter with praise and prayer. Let me direct your attention to the prayer which concludes it (3: 14-21). We need to set it in its context.

The apostle has been unfolding God's eternal purpose to unite all things under the headship of Christ (1: 10), and meanwhile—as a means to that end and a foretaste of it—to reconcile Jews and Gentiles to each other and to God and so to create 'a single new humanity' (2: 11-22).

This union of Jews and Gentiles with each other through their common union with Christ is the 'mystery' which has been revealed to Paul (3: 3-6) and which is now to be made known to all men through the preaching of the gospel, and to the principalities and powers through the multi-coloured phenomenon of the church (3: 8-10).

Such is Paul's vision. And now he prays that the dream may come true. He begins 'for this reason' (14), resuming his train of thought where he left it in verse 1. For what reason does he pray? Surely because of the greatness of God's reconciliation and because of his personal responsibility as apostle to the Gentiles to make this good news known.

'I bow my knees before the Father,' he says. Now the normal posture for prayer among Jews was standing. In Jesus' parable of the pharisee and the publican both men 'stood to pray' (Lk. 18: 11, 13). So kneeling was unusual; it indicated an exceptional degree of earnestness, as when Jesus knelt in the garden of Gethsemane, falling on his face to the ground. Scripture lays down no rule about the posture we should adopt when praying. It is possible to pray kneeling, standing, sitting, walking and even lying. But I think we may agree with William Hendriksen that 'the slouching position of the body while one is supposed to be praying is an abomination to the Lord'!

His prayer is addressed 'to the Father', of whose family or household Jews and Gentiles are now through Christ equal members (2: 19). He is the

'one God and Father of us all' (4: 5). It is natural therefore that Paul should go on to affirm that from this one heavenly Father 'the whole family' is named. Since the emphasis of these chapters is on the unity of God's family, it seems unlikely that the right translation should be 'every family' (RSV, NEB). It refers rather to 'the whole family of believers' (NIV). This family includes 'heaven and earth', that is, the church militant on earth and the church triumphant in heaven. Although separated by death, they are still both part of the one family of God.

At the same time, there is a deliberate play on words, 'Father' being *patēr* and 'family' being *patria*. It is this which has led some translators to try to keep the verbal assonance and render 'the Father from whom all fatherhood . . .'. This seems legitimate because, although *patria* means 'family' not 'fatherhood' in the abstract, yet it is a family descended from the same father and therefore the concept of fatherhood is implied.

It may be, then, that Paul is saying not only that the whole Christian family is named from the Father, but that the very *concepts* of fatherhood and family are derived from God. In this case the true relationship between human fatherhood and the divine fatherhood is neither one of *analogy* (God is a Father like human fathers), nor one of *projection* (Freud's theory that men have invented God because they needed a heavenly father-figure), but one of *derivation* (God's fatherhood being the archetypal reality, what Armitage Robinson calls 'the source of all conceivable fatherhood').

To this Father Paul prays that God will give certain gifts 'out of the riches of his glory'. His prayer is like a staircase by which he ascends higher and higher in his aspiration for them. His prayer-staircase has four steps whose keywords are 'strength' (that they might be strengthened by Christ's indwelling through the Spirit), secondly 'love' (that they might be rooted and grounded in love), thirdly 'knowledge' (that they might know Christ's love in all its dimensions, although it is beyond knowledge), and fourthly 'fullness' (that they might be filled up to the very fullness of God).

## 1. Strength

Paul's first prayer to God is that 'he may grant you

to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith'. These two petitions clearly belong together. Both refer to our innermost self, 'the inner man' in the first and 'your hearts' in the second. And although the first specifies the strength of 'his Spirit' and the other the indwelling of 'Christ', both surely refer to the same experience. For Paul never separates the second and third persons of the Trinity. To have Christ dwelling in us and the Spirit dwelling in us are the same thing (see Romans 8: 9-11). Indeed, it is precisely by the Spirit that Christ dwells in the believer's heart, and it is strength which he gives us when he dwells there.

Somebody will perhaps object that surely Paul is praying for Christians, so how can he pray that Christ may dwell in their hearts? Was not Christ already indwelling them? Does not Christ dwell by his Spirit in the heart of every believer? Our reply to these questions would be 'yes indeed', and we would appeal to Romans 8: 9 and 1 Corinthians 6: 19 for biblical warrant. But, as C. H. Hodge puts it, 'the indwelling of Christ is a thing of degrees'. So also is the inward strengthening of the Spirit. What Paul prays for his readers is that they may 'know the strength of the Spirit's inner reinforcement' (JBP), that they may lay hold ever more firmly 'by faith' of this divine strength, this divine indwelling.

Bishop Handley Moule throws further light on the text by his elucidation of the verb. 'The word selected (*katoikein*) . . . is a word made expressly to denote residence as against lodging, the abode of a master within his own home as against the turning aside for a night of the wayfarer who will be gone tomorrow.' Again, it is 'the residence always in the heart of its Master and Lord, who where he dwells must rule; who enters not to cheer and soothe alone but before all things else to reign' (*Veni Creator*, Hodder, 1890, pp. 235, 240).

## 2. Love

If we were to ask Paul what he wanted his readers to be strengthened for, I think he would reply that they needed strength to love. So he prayed that they might be 'rooted and grounded in love' (17). For in the new and reconciled humanity which God has created, love is the pre-eminent virtue. The new humanity is God's family. Its members are no longer aliens and strangers (separated from each other by race, nationality or class) but brothers and sisters who love the same Father and love each other as brethren. Or rather should do! But we

need the power of the Spirit's might and of Christ's indwelling to enable us to love.

In order to express how fundamental Paul desires love to be in their lives, he joins two metaphors, botanical and architectural, in the expression 'rooted and grounded in love'. He wants them to have 'deep roots and firm foundations' (NEB). Thus he likens them first to a well-rooted tree and second to a well-built house. Yet the unseen stability of both is due to the same thing, namely love. Love is to be the soil in which their life is rooted, the foundation (*themelios*), on which their life is built. Thus love is to nourish and to stabilise all their relationships, whether to God or to each other.

## 3. Knowledge

The apostle's third petition is that they 'may have power to comprehend . . . and to know the love of Christ'.

Indeed he prays that they may comprehend it in its full dimensions, its 'breadth and length and height and depth' (18). Modern commentators warn us not to be too literal in our interpretation of these dimensions. Yet it seems to me legitimate, and more than preacher's rhetoric, to say that the love of Christ is 'broad' enough to encompass Jews and Gentiles, indeed all mankind, 'long' enough to last for eternity, 'deep' enough to reach the most degraded sinner and 'high' enough to exalt him to heaven.

Ancient commentators went further and saw these dimensions pictorially displayed in the cross, whose upright pole reached down into the earth and pointed up to heaven, while its crossbar carried the arms of Jesus stretched out as if to embrace the world. Armitage Robinson called this a 'pretty fancy', but then some pretty fancies are true!

Notice that we can comprehend these dimensions of Christ's love only 'with all the saints'. The isolated individual Christian can indeed know something of Christ's love. But his grasp of it is limited by his limited experience. It needs the whole people of God to understand the whole love of God—'all the saints' of every race, nation, culture and temperament, with all their varied experience of Christ.

Even then, the love of Christ 'surpasses knowledge' (19). Christ's love is as unknowable as his riches are unsearchable (8). Doubtless we shall spend eternity exploring the inexhaustible riches of divine love.

#### 4. Fullness

The apostle's fourth petition for them is 'that you may be filled with all the fullness of God' (19).

Now 'fullness' is a characteristic word of the parallel epistles to the Ephesians and the Colossians. In these letters Paul tells us both that the fullness of the Godhead dwells in Christ and that we in Christ have ourselves come to fullness (Col. 1: 19; 2: 9, 10). At the same time he implies that there is still room for growth. As individuals we are to go on being filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5: 18). And the church, which already as Christ's body is his fullness, filled by him (Eph. 1: 23), is to 'grow up into him' until it attains mature manhood, even the measure of the stature of Christ's fullness (Eph. 4: 13, 15).

The desire Paul expresses here in his prayer is strictly not that his readers may be filled 'with' all the fullness of God (AV, RSV) but rather that they may be filled 'up to' (*eis*) God's fullness, that they may be 'filled to the measure of all the fullness of God' (NIV). This staggering expression must surely look on to the final state of perfection in heaven when together we enter the completeness of all God's purpose for us and are filled to capacity, right up to that fullness of God which human beings can receive without ceasing to be human. Meanwhile, we are to grow towards that destiny now, being changed into Christ's image from one degree of glory to another (2 Cor. 3: 18).

These four petitions are sandwiched between two references to God. In verse 15 he is the Father from whom the whole family derives, and in verse 20 he is the one who works powerfully within us. Indeed, God's ability to answer prayer is forcefully stated now in a composite expression of seven stages.

First, God is able to 'work' or 'do', for he is not idle, inactive or dead.

Secondly, he is able to do 'what we ask', for he answers prayer.

Thirdly, he is able to do what we ask 'or think', for sometimes we imagine things we dare not ask.

Fourthly, he is able to do 'all' that we ask or think.

Fifthly, he is able to do 'more than' all that we ask or think.

Sixthly, he is able to do 'far more' than all that we ask or think.

Seventhly, he is able to do 'far more abundantly', 'immeasurably more' (NIV), indeed 'infinitely more' (JBP) than all that we ask or think. The word *huperekperissou* is one of Paul's coined 'super-superlatives' (F.F. Bruce).

All this is 'by the power at work within us' (20)—within us individually (Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith) and within us as a people (God dwelling in and among his people as his temple, 2: 21, 22). It is the power of Christ's resurrection, the power which raised Christ from the dead and enthroned him at God's right hand (1: 19–23). It is that power which is at work in the Christian and in the church.

Paul's prayer concerns the fulfilment of his vision of the new society which God has created in and through Christ. He prays that we may be rooted and grounded in love, and may know Christ's love although it passes knowledge. Then he turns from the love of God past knowing to the power of God past imagining, from limitless love to limitless power. He is convinced, as we must be, that only divine power can generate divine love in the divine society.

He ends his prayer with a doxology. 'Now to him (this God of resurrection power, who alone can make the dream come true) be glory.' The power comes from him; the glory must go to him.

And the glory must be his 'in the church and in Christ Jesus' together, in the body and in the Head, for the church is the reconciled community and Christ is the agent of the reconciliation.

And the glory must be his 'to all generations (in history) for ever and ever (in eternity)'. Amen.

# Orthodoxy and heresy in earlier Christianity

I Howard Marshall

*In April 1975 the Historical Theology Group of the Tyndale Fellowship held a conference at Dunblane, Scotland, at which they considered the theme of 'Heresy'. This paper, first delivered at that conference, and subsequently at a meeting of the Scottish Divinity Faculties, examines the view, which has gained a wide following since the publication in English of Bauer's important book, that the categories of 'orthodoxy' and 'heresy' are a later development, foreign to New Testament Christianity. Dr Marshall, Senior Lecturer in New Testament Exegesis at the University of Aberdeen, was for several years editor of the TSF Bulletin.*

There is a story, possibly apocryphal, which tells how the Roman Catholics once advertised a public meeting in Sydney, Australia; on their posters they presented their claim to be the upholders of pure Christianity by means of the slogan 'The Faith of our Fathers'. Not to be outdone, the Protestants arranged a rival meeting with the redoubtable T. C. Hammond as their speaker, and they advertised as their title, 'The Faith of our Grandfathers'. The title of this essay is somewhat similar to the Protestant parody. It is a secondary elaboration of a more famous phrase, and will be readily recognized as a parody of the title of a well-known book by Walter Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*. As with a number of other significant German books, the importance of this one was not recognized in this country until long after its original publication. English-reading students have had to wait until the last twelve years to see translations of the works of William Wrede, Wilhelm Bousset and Rudolf Bultmann, and with them of W. Bauer, first published in 1934 and not available in English until 1972 (in America, 1971).<sup>1</sup> Unlike the others, however, which hit the headlines on the Continent at the time of publication, Bauer's work came at a time when the German church was preoccupied with other more pressing issues, and it had to wait till after the war for due recognition.

Bauer's basic thesis was a polemical one and is best summed up in his own words: he argued that, according to the generally accepted interpretation of the situation, 'Jesus revealed the true teaching to his apostles who in their turn went out into all the world after the ascension to hand on the unadulterated gospel to the peoples. It was only after their death that obstacles arose for the preaching from the Christian side. For now some people who were misled by the devil gave up the apostolic preaching which had been the means of their conversion and put in its place their own human ideas. Thus in the post-apostolic period there arose heresies of various kinds which could certainly be very annoying to the church but never in any form really dangerous.

'This conception (he went on) must be tested for its accuracy by means of history. Did the order: unbelief, orthodox belief, false belief, which is said to have been the case everywhere, really correspond with the facts or not, or was it the case to a limited extent that must be worked out and expressed?'<sup>2</sup>

In order to settle this question Bauer thought it best to start outside the disputed area of the NT writings. And so he proceeded to do a package tour of the world of early second century Christianity in order to discover whether the rise of what came to be called heresy was always preceded by orthodox teaching from which it had deviated. A close study of the rise of the church in Edessa and Alexandria suggested to him that in the beginning so-called unorthodox groups were predominant; what was later regarded as orthodoxy was represented at best by small groups, so that from the very beginning so-called heretical and orthodox forms of the faith existed side by side. The churches were more 'orthodox' in Asia Minor, but various arguments suggest that there were strong pockets of unorthodox Christianity in this area. If the position was different in Corinth, where the church certainly began with strong heretical tendencies, this was due to the influence of Rome imposing its views on the church. It could be said that 'the form which Christianity gained in Rome was led to

<sup>1</sup> W. Bauer, *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum* (Tübingen, 1934); reprinted 1964; Eng. tr.: *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* (London, 1972).

<sup>2</sup> From W. Bauer's own summary statement of his thesis in his *Aufsätze und kleine Schriften* (ed. G. Strecker, Tübingen, 1967), pp. 229-233 (my translation).

victory by Rome and thus established as orthodoxy'.<sup>3</sup> Bauer then went on to show how Rome established its own doctrinal position as the orthodox one. It was largely because the heretics were independent of one another and unable to unite with one another in opposition to Rome that they eventually succumbed to her influence. The great mass of middle-of-the-road Christians who might well have been won over by either wing of the church in fact threw in their lot with Rome.

Bauer thus concluded that what later came to be regarded as orthodoxy was only one of several competing systems of Christian belief, with no closer links to any original, so-called 'apostolic Christianity' than its rivals, and that it owed its victory in the competition more to what we might call political influences than to its inherent merits.

The corollary to be drawn from Bauer's discussion is that things were no different in the first century. Thus R. Bultmann, who fully accepted Bauer's arguments, stated: 'The diversity of theological interests and ideas is at first great. A norm or an authoritative court of appeal for doctrine is still lacking, and the proponents of directions of thought which were later rejected as heretical consider themselves completely Christian, such as Christian Gnosticism. In the beginning, *faith* is the term which distinguishes the Christian Congregation from Jews and the heathen, not *orthodoxy* (right doctrine). The latter along with its correlate, *heresy*, arises out of the differences which develop within the Christian congregations.'<sup>4</sup> It is interesting, however, that Bultmann proceeds to say, 'In the nature of the case this takes place very early'.

The argument was taken further by G. Strecker in an investigation of Jewish Christianity in an appendix to the 1964 edition of Bauer's book; he argued that Jewish Christianity was diverse in character and that what must be considered as historically primary in the first century was seen to be heretical when compared with what later was regarded as orthodoxy.<sup>5</sup>

A somewhat similar point of view appears to be represented by Stephen S. Smalley in his examination of 'Diversity and Development in John'. He submits that in the Gospel of John, as distinct from the Epistles, we have a considerable diversity of views expressed, some of which could be seized upon as supporting their cause by later, orthodox writers, others of which could be seized upon by the

heretics. He therefore states that: 'John's diversity can hardly be regarded as consciously orthodox or heretical; it is neither one nor the other. If such considerations had influenced John's writing, it is very unlikely that he would have left so much on the "orthodox" side unsaid, and so much on the "heretical" side open to misconstruction, to be used eventually in evidence against him.'<sup>6</sup>

The scope of the present essay, confined as it is to the first century, enables me to side-step a discussion of the correctness or otherwise of Bauer's thesis as it applies to post-apostolic Christianity—although it must be observed that if it is inapplicable to the second century, it can hardly be applied to the first century. On the whole, it seems to have been subjected to considerable modification in detail, but few have been willing to contradict its main lines. If it has done nothing else, it has emphasized the prevalence of diversity in the second century church and the difficulty that existed in attempting to draw clear boundaries between what was orthodox and what was heretical.<sup>7</sup> My starting-point is rather the fact that Bauer had the effrontery to label the second century as 'earliest Christianity', and I want to look at the period which is in fact earlier than this, the period of the New Testament itself.

## 1. Unity, variety and diversity

In the essay which I have already quoted, S. S. Smalley suggests that the key to our problem in John's Gospel may lie in the categories of diversity and development. These two terms give us a set of co-ordinates against which the ideas of the early church might be plotted in such a way that the variety of ideas at any one given time may be seen, and also the differences in ideas between one period of time and another. A recent book of essays by H. Koester and J. M. Robinson has used the term 'trajectories' to give expression to this kind of approach, although it is obvious that the name, like the word 'canon', is simply a new invention to

<sup>3</sup> S. S. Smalley, 'Diversity and Development in John', *NTS* 17 (1970-1971), pp. 276-292, quotation from p. 279.

<sup>7</sup> For a survey of reactions to Bauer's thesis, see the appendix to his book by G. Strecker and R. A. Kraft (*op. cit.*, pp. 286-316). More recent discussions include: H.-D. Altendorf, 'Zum Stichwort: Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum', *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 80 (1969), pp. 61-74; M. Elze, 'Häresie und Einheit der Kirche im 2. Jahrhundert', *ZTK* 71 (1974), pp. 389-409; A. I. C. Heron, 'The Interpretation of I. Clement in Walter Bauer's "Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum"', *Ekklesiastikos Pharos*, IV (1973) (NE), pp. 517-545.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, II (London, 1955), p. 135.

<sup>6</sup> G. Strecker, 'On the Problem of Jewish Christianity', in W. Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy*, pp. 241-285.

describe a concept of which scholars have long been conscious.<sup>8</sup>

Granted that there is diversity and development in the theologies expressed in the New Testament, the question is whether this is the same thing as saying that no distinction between orthodoxy and heresy was being made, or that this concept did not exist prior to the development of a vocabulary to describe it. And at once it is obvious that the two things are not the same. It is possible, in other words, for there to be a variety in presentation of the Christian faith without the varied presentations being incompatible with one another. It is probable that in the church at Corinth different cliques attached themselves to the names of Paul, Apollos and Cephas. No doubt these three men presented the gospel in different ways, and it may well be that their followers developed their own individual ideas, but Paul was quite clear that there was no fundamental incompatibility between himself and his colleagues in the presentation of the gospel. 'We are fellow workers for God'; 'All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos, or Cephas, . . . all are yours' (1 Cor. 3: 9, 21f.). In the same way, while it was judged politic for there to be two Christian missions, one to the circumcised and one to the uncircumcised, they were in fellowship with one another, and there is no suggestion of any fundamental disagreement between them (Gal. 2: 7-9). Bauer's attempt to interpret Paul's statement otherwise is somewhat mischievous.

The fact of such a basic unity was emphasized by A. M. Hunter in a book which is of importance out of proportion to its size. In *The Unity of the New Testament*<sup>9</sup> he argued that the major writers of the New Testament show a basic unity in their testimony to one Lord, one church and one salvation. Writing in 1943, Hunter was working against a background of stress on the diversity within the New Testament. This was presented in another product of Scottish theology by E. F. Scott in *The Varieties of New Testament Religion*.<sup>10</sup> He was equally rightly concerned to emphasize the lack of uniformity in the New Testament: the writers 'are all inspired by the one faith, but every teacher interprets it differently, as he has known it in his own soul'.<sup>11</sup> Both of these points of view need to be heard, but perhaps it is the voice of Hunter which has had less attention than it deserves in our own

day. Where Scott is distinctly woolly in his survey and makes generalizations do duty in place of hard facts, Hunter is careful to give evidence for his statements and to argue a case which is the more impressive by reason of its restraint and caution.

But Hunter was concerned with the writers of the New Testament. He made no attempt to claim that Paul and his opponents in Galatia had a basic unity in their theology. The question that now arises concerns the degree of variety in the life and thought of the early church which is reflected in the New Testament: at what point, if any, does variety become a deviation from the truth?

## 2. The later books of the New Testament

We shall now make an attempt to look at the evidence relevant to this second question, and like Bauer, it may be helpful to begin with what are usually thought to be the latest writings in the New Testament, then turn to the generally accepted letters of Paul, and finally to the Gospels.

In the *Pastoral Epistles*<sup>12</sup> we have a writer who is confronted by teaching which he regards as false in the churches for which he has a responsibility. At the outset of 1 Timothy there is an instruction not to allow people to teach 'different doctrine'; it is associated with speculation about myths and genealogies and it leads to vain discussion instead of growth in faith. Such teaching appears to have rested on what the author regarded as a misunderstanding of the law, and to have led to an intellectual type of religion which ignored the claims of conscience. Over against it the author places 'healthy doctrine', which he characterizes as being in accordance with the gospel (1 Tim. 1: 3-11). This basic theme is repeated throughout the Pastorals, most clearly in 1 Timothy and Titus. It is probable that the writer was confronted by a type of Gnosticizing teaching with strong Jewish elements, which laid stress on knowledge and which led both to asceticism and to moral licence. What is important is that he is clearly aware of its existence and of its distinction from what he regards as the truth. The lines are firmly drawn. The

<sup>12</sup> Since most scholars hold that the Pastoral Epistles are post-Pauline and are some of the latest writings in the NT, our discussion assumes that view for the sake of the argument. In other words, our discussion is intended to show that even on the assumption of a late date for the Epistles they testify to the existence of a clear distinction between orthodoxy and heresy at the end of the first century. Our point, therefore, does not depend on acceptance of a conservative view of the authorship and date of the Epistles, although conservative scholars who believe that there are good grounds for substituting 'Paul' for 'the writer' in the text will be able to claim that there was a concern for right doctrine at an earlier date than most critical scholars would allow.

<sup>8</sup> H. Koester and J. M. Robinson, *Trajectories through Early Christianity* (Philadelphia, 1971).

<sup>9</sup> A. M. Hunter, *The Unity of the New Testament* (London, 1943).

<sup>10</sup> E. F. Scott, *The Varieties of New Testament Religion* (New York, 1946).

<sup>11</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 305.

teaching is 'other' and does not conduce to spiritual 'health'. It produces moral behaviour which is incompatible with godliness. Over against it the writer places healthy teaching, and he clearly reckons with the existence of traditions in the church, such as the 'faithful sayings', which enshrine the truth of the gospel. He regards the church as being the pillar and bulwark of the truth.

It is impossible to avoid the conclusion that in these Epistles the writer is conscious of being the defender of truth and that he is prepared to take disciplinary measures against those who persist in erroneous beliefs. The very word *hairesikos* is used in this connection. It is perhaps not unfair to say that the Pastorals were composed in a situation of false teaching threatening the truth, and that their basic purpose is to deal with this situation by outlining the true nature of Christian living, and by equipping the church with leaders who will be able to promote the cause of orthodoxy.

This understanding of the Pastorals was, of course, shared by Bauer, but it did not basically affect his thesis because he was prepared to put them at a rather late date and to see them as directed against Marcionite teaching. If this late dating is wrong, an obvious weakness in Bauer's case is opened up. The trend in recent scholarship is in fact to date the Epistles in the first decade of the second century, and this is a significant shift in placing them historically.<sup>13</sup> Even this date is probably too late, and there is good reason to place them considerably earlier. But the commonly accepted date is sufficient to allow us to make our point, that *a distinction between orthodoxy and heresy had come into existence by the end of the first century or just after*.

The *Revelation* can probably be dated in the last decade of the first century. Its author's main concern was to strengthen the church to face persecution, but in order to achieve this aim he realized that the church must be purified of false belief and immorality; otherwise it would fall under the judgments of God on the world at large. His attack is directed mainly against attempts to combine idolatry and idolatrous practices with Christian faith. The apostolic decree requiring abstinence from food sacrificed to idols and from immorality (Acts 15: 29) was evidently being flouted. There were people around who called themselves apostles, and there was a prophetess who gave the weight of her authority to idolatrous practices and immorality

<sup>13</sup> The date assigned by W. G. Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament* (London, 1966), p. 272, is typical of recent study. For arguments in favour of Pauline authorship see D. Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles* (London, 1957); J. N. D. Kelly, *The Pastoral Epistles* (London, 1963).

(Rev. 2: 2, 20). The implication is that the upholders of this position felt it necessary to claim support for their views by appeal to ecclesiastical office and to Spirit-inspired revelations. It looks as though they formed a definite group in the church. Their teaching may well have had a Gnosticizing tinge, as is suggested by the allusion to the deep things of Satan (Rev. 2: 24). The other members of the church are said to have tested the false prophets and found them wanting; they are criticized for not throwing out Jezebel as well. But what is perhaps of greatest interest is that the group attacked by John are referred to as Nicolaitans, followers of Nicolaus (Rev. 2: 6, 15). They are thus known by the name of their leader, real or imaginary, in the same way as later groups of heretics were identified. This is to my knowledge the first example of such a procedure, and it is highly significant as showing that already within New Testament times it was possible to identify and label a group regarded as heretical. In other words, the lines were already being clearly drawn. Unfortunately, much is left obscure; we should like to know how the heretics saw themselves, how they established their claim to authority, and how they regarded their opponents.

We are not surprised to find the word *hairesis* being used in its developed sense in what is often regarded as the latest writing in the New Testament, 2 Peter (2: 1). The writer is concerned about the rise of false teachers in the church. Their behaviour was licentious; it appears to have involved a rejection of the morality enshrined in the law, and to have questioned some aspects of Christian teaching, including the hope of the parousia. Above all they despised and reviled the accepted authority in the church. They evidently appealed to the writings of Paul in support of their teaching, and imposed what the author regarded as a false interpretation upon them. They also claimed prophetic inspiration. The picture is similar to that in Revelation, but the heresy appears to have gone further, and to have taken the step of claiming Pauline support. We should naturally like to know how they interpreted Paul. It seems probable that some of his teaching may have been understood as sanctioning antinomianism, although it is hard to find passages in his existing Epistles which give much support to such views.

The situation reflected in *Jude* appears to have been similar to that in 2 Peter. Here again opponents of the writer are to be found in the church, and have not yet been ejected. They are castigated for their immorality and contentiousness which have caused divisions in the church. We learn nothing



about the actual content of their teaching. The author's reply is to call his readers back to the tradition which they have received, to the faith once for all delivered to the saints; he has no doubt that this stands in opposition to the teaching which he is criticizing. This may reflect a slightly earlier stage than in 2 Peter, since the heretical appeal to tradition may well have followed the orthodox appeal by claiming that the orthodox were misinterpreting it.

A clear consciousness of differing opinions in the church is found in 1-3 *John*. In 2 *John* the writer speaks of deceivers who deny the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. There are people who do not abide in the doctrine of Christ. It is probable that some off-beat christological teaching is in mind, possibly a docetic denial that Jesus really was the Christ, or that the Christ really became incarnate in Jesus. In 1 *John* the group has come out into the open and begun a separate existence. Three important facts characterize the Elder's reply. One is that he attacks this point of view on the intellectual level by asserting that the doctrine of God is jeopardized by this teaching. One cannot truly believe in the Father without also believing in the Son. In other words, a heresy which may have seemed innocuous or marginal is shown to affect understanding of basic doctrine. This point is stressed throughout 1 *John*. Second, the writer's stress on the need for love, shown in practical ways, is a flank attack on his opponents' position, but he does not indulge in empty abuse against them; rather he invites his readers to apply the test of 'By their fruits you shall know them'. The third point is that the writer holds that fellowship should not be extended to those who maintain this point of view; we may compare the similar command in Titus 3:10f. Those who adopt such teaching are equated with antichrist (*i.e.* the opponent of Christ, rather than somebody taking the place of Christ). A distinction between different groups with different doctrines is consciously taking place.

It is not clear whether a situation of heresy is reflected in 3 *John*. It is well known that E. Käsemann has proposed that Diotrephes was really the champion of orthodoxy, attempting to stifle the influence of the unorthodox Elder, but there is good reason to reject this interpretation.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, there is no proof that Diotrephes was unorthodox; at the most he appears to have been ambitious and curt with his possible rivals.

We can quickly pass over *James* and 1 *Peter* in

our survey. The writer of the former letter, it is true, has been thought to be critical of Paul, but his real bone of contention is with Christians lacking in the works of love who probably claimed Paul in support of their own position. From both *James* and 2 *Peter* it can be seen that appeal was made to Paul in support of opinions that were denied by other New Testament writers; but both 2 *Peter* and *James* regard Paul as being on their side, and *James* does not give the impression of regarding the people whom he is criticizing as heretics.

We may summarize our conclusions so far by noting that in the late first century church there was a consciousness of the distinction between orthodoxy and heresy. Appeal was made on both sides to the teaching of the apostles and to the voice of prophecy. There was a consciousness of an inherited body of belief, 'the faith', and excommunication was beginning to be used as a weapon. There is no reason to suppose that these ideas developed without previous preparation: we are justified in examining the other New Testament documents to see whether they reflect a development towards this position.

### 3. Paul

We turn, therefore, back to Paul. Almost everywhere in his writings we can detect the presence of opponents who questioned his teaching or put up some other teaching instead of it. To be sure, it is unlikely that this is the case in 1 *Thessalonians* where such problems as arose were probably due simply to the inadequate grounding which his converts had had in his teaching before he was forced to leave them. The situation is one of questions and uncertainties rather than opposition to his teaching. The situation in 2 *Thessalonians* is at first sight very similar, but it is interesting that in attacking the view that the day of the Lord has already arrived Paul should refer to the possibility of a spirit or word or letter purporting to be from himself, and that he urges the readers to hold fast to the traditions which he has taught them orally or by letter. Further, he lays stress on the importance of what he says in this letter to the extent that anyone who does not accept its teaching is to be solemnly warned and disciplined. Such strict discipline is not unparalleled in Paul (1 *Cor.* 5). The significant facts are rather that Paul considers the error which he is opposing to be so serious and that he suspects that his own authority has been used to defend it. It is not surprising that this Epistle has been thought to be post-Pauline, and to reflect an attempt by the orthodox to claim Paul's

<sup>14</sup> E. Käsemann, 'Ketzer und Zeuge', *ZTK* 48 (1951), pp. 292-311.

authority for their own position instead of that of their rivals. There appears to be an organized opposition against the Pauline position. But the situation is comprehensible if the life of the church is in danger of being crippled by an apocalyptic enthusiasm which has upset normal daily life. Nor would it be surprising if a prophet claimed to speak in the name of the Lord, and even claimed the authority of Paul (*cf.* Acts 19:13). The Pauline situation remains the more probable, and, if correct, it shows that at an early date teaching opposed to that of Paul was being promulgated with a false appeal to his authority, and that the answer to this teaching was for Paul himself to claim that he had been wrongly interpreted. It was presumably because of this direct misrepresentation of his own views that Paul spoke out so strongly against those who rejected his authority in Thessalonica.

Nobody denies that Paul himself faced opposition when he composed *Galatians*, but the situation is more than a little complex. We need to distinguish between the opposition in Galatia itself, and that which Paul experienced in Jerusalem and Antioch. Then we must assess correctly the nature of the opposition experienced by Paul. There are two main views of this, namely that it was either Judaizing or Gnostic, but the case that it was Judaizing is the stronger of the two. If so, this means that the same type of opposition was prevalent in Galatia and on the home front. The opposition in Galatia was Jewish or Jewish-Christian in inspiration, and it received the full force of Paul's opposition because it compromised the doctrine of faith in Christ which he regarded as all-important. Acceptance of the contrary point of view called the mission to the Gentiles in question. Paul's defence, as is well known, rested on an appeal to history, to experience and to Scripture. He was able to claim that his message had been accepted by the leaders of the church in Jerusalem; the weakness in this argument was the strange case at Antioch where Peter and Barnabas sided against him, and Paul never says that they changed their minds, although the friendly allusions to them in 1 *Corinthians* would imply that they did in fact do so. But, while it is possible that Paul passed over their initial reaction with a discreet silence, it is more likely that he was simply carried away by the force of his own argument. His second appeal was to experience, both his own and that of his converts; he could point to his own revelation of Jesus at his conversion, which for him had immediate authority, and he could also point to the way in which his converts received the gift of the Spirit

apart from the law. His third appeal was to Scripture, showing from the Old Testament that God's principle of working with men, even in the era of the law, was by faith. Since his converts had not yet apparently succumbed to what he regarded as error, he was able to address them in terms of appeal rather than condemnation; but he spoke in no uncertain terms about those who were leading them astray. He called down God's curse on anybody who was doing this. There could be no other gospel than Paul's gospel. There is no appeal to apostolic authority here other than his own; Paul argues from his own experience of Christ.

By the time of 1 *Corinthians*, however, Paul is more conscious of the significance of tradition, to which he makes appeal more than once. His bases for argument include the commands of the Lord, as well as his own consciousness of inspiration by the Spirit. He can appeal to the practice of other apostles. This suggests that the opposition to Paul stood outside the mainstream of the church, even if there was appeal to Apollos and Cephas. Basically, Paul appears to have been confronted by two groups in the church, one Jewish Christian and the other incipient Gnostic. The former were 'weak' in faith, but not heretical; Paul thinks they are wrong, but does not condemn their error, and indeed seeks a sympathetic approach to them from the rest of the church. On the point at issue, he tended to side with the strong Christians. But the impression we gain is of a church with tendencies that could lead to error, judged by Pauline standards, rather than with full-blown heresy. There was immoral and licentious behaviour to be corrected. There was an over-emphasis on spiritual gifts unaccompanied by love. There may have been a false understanding of the resurrection. But the whole tone of the letter is that of a wise pastor, rather than that of someone determined to stamp out organized opposition at any cost. The extent of the opposition to Paul in Corinth at this point can easily be exaggerated.

The fact of opposition is clearer in 2 *Corinthians* 10-13, but in this middle period of Paul's work the problems of interpretation are complex. Here we do hear of preaching of *another Jesus*, a *different spirit* and a *different gospel* which did not lead to reformation of life (2 Cor. 11:4). There was opposition to Paul by persons who claimed apostolic status, who regarded themselves as engaged on a mission similar to his own and under superior auspices. They were in danger of assuming control of the church at Corinth. Paul was strenuously opposed to them, as they were to him. He speaks of them in the strongest terms as servants of Satan,

and it may well be that they regarded him in similar terms. There is no doubt, then, that lines were being drawn between opposing sides. But what was the basis of the disagreement with them? I am not convinced by the theory that they were Gnostics, nor that they thought of themselves as divine men preaching a Jesus who was similarly a divine man. The truth is that the nature of the doctrinal disagreement scarcely comes to the surface in this section of the Epistle. They were Jews, possibly claiming special credentials from Jerusalem, people whom Paul regarded as proud of their position and making extravagant claims and demands for themselves in virtue of it, people who claimed spiritual visions and revelations. But it is extraordinarily hard to discern exactly what they believed and taught. Paul simply places his own claims over against theirs and attacks their claims rather than their message. Nor is it clear why they were so opposed to Paul. Did they regard his teaching as false, or were they simply jealous of his success, or what? And suppose some third party came along: how could he tell which group was 'orthodox'? These questions can hardly be answered for lack of information.

In *Romans* we have evidence of people who create dissensions and stand in opposition to the doctrine which Paul taught; they are not in Paul's eyes true servants of Jesus, but they serve their own carnal natures. Schmithals regards them as Gnostics, but it is doubtful whether the evidence takes us that far. But it may be that the same sort of rival mission as we found in 2 Corinthians is reflected here, and that Paul feared persons travelling around in his footsteps and contradicting his teaching. Once again we note that their teaching is not detailed nor refuted by Paul; he simply warns against them, and their deceitful methods of establishing their views. This is significant as regards the later Epistles which, it is sometimes said, reflect a lack of argument with heresy in contrast to Paul's own earlier attempts to deal more rationally with it.

In *Philippians* again there is danger to the church from persons who uphold circumcision. Here the most plausible identification of the opponents of Paul is as Judaizers. But the situation is complicated by the mention of people who claimed some kind of perfection and those whom Paul regarded as enemies of the cross who pandered to their own fleshly desires. This wording is similar to that in *Romans* and suggests that the same group were on their rounds. They could be antinomians. The danger comes from outside the church, and perhaps this is why Paul does not deal with its errors in

detail; it may be a potential rather than a real situation.

The same is possibly true of *Colossians*. Here it has been traditional to find evidence of a developed Gnostic heresy, but recently M. D. Hooker has strongly challenged this assumption, and shown that it is doubtful whether there was a coherent, organized heresy.<sup>15</sup> Paul's teaching, it is said, 'seems to us to be quite as appropriate to a situation in which young Christians are under pressure to conform to the beliefs and practices of their pagan and Jewish neighbours, as to a situation in which their faith is endangered by the deliberate attacks of false teachers'.<sup>16</sup> Whatever be the situation, Paul's reply is to call the church back to the way in which it received Christ as Lord, and to the gospel which it preached throughout all the world. The doctrines of the person of Christ and of union with him leading to ethical behaviour are his reply to false versions of the gospel.

#### 4. The Gospels

We turn, finally, to the Gospels before attempting to draw some conclusions. Traces of polemic have been found in all of them. This is least obvious in the case of *Luke* along with its companion, *Acts*. Certainly there is one clear warning against the rise of heresy in the church in the post-Pauline period, which may well reflect earlier struggles, but on the whole little is said about the nature of such troubles. The attempt by C. H. Talbert to find Gnostics under *Luke's* bed seems to me singularly unsuccessful.<sup>17</sup> What we do have is the early struggle of the church to deal with Judaizing tendencies, and this struggle is regarded as being successfully resolved in favour of the Pauline position. There is a point of view which is resisted and shown to be wrong, and the proof is found in the manifest willingness of God to accept the Gentiles and bestow the Spirit upon them apart from acceptance of circumcision. The argument is not dissimilar to that in *Galatians*.

In *Matthew* E. Schweizer has found opposition to a group of enthusiasts who sat loose to the ethical teaching of Jesus.<sup>18</sup> It is this Gospel more than any other which bears witness to the fact of a mixed church with true and false believers in it. But the nature of a Gospel prevents direct address

<sup>15</sup> M. D. Hooker, 'Were there false teachers in Colossae?', in B. Lindars and S. S. Smalley (eds.), *Christ and Spirit in the New Testament* (Cambridge, 1973), pp. 315-331.

<sup>16</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 329.

<sup>17</sup> C. H. Talbert, *Luke and the Gnostics* (Nashville, 1966).

<sup>18</sup> E. Schweizer, 'Observance of the Law and Charismatic Activity in Matthew', *NTS* 16 (1969-1970), pp. 213-230.

to such people, and all that can be done is to present the relevant teaching of Jesus, in some cases carefully underlined to bring out the significant points for the situation.

It is chiefly in *Mark* that recent students have found polemic against heresy. Especially in the work of T. J. Weeden<sup>19</sup> and N. Perrin<sup>20</sup> we have the suggestion that the disciples are identified with a false view of the person of Jesus over against which Jesus himself presents the truth. They were tempted to think of him as Messiah and Son of God in terms of a divine man working miracles, whereas Mark insisted that this view must be qualified by the preaching of Jesus as the Son of man who must suffer and die before being glorified. The main essentials of this position are accepted by R. P. Martin, who, however, does not identify the disciples as the carriers of the false view.<sup>21</sup>

With respect to *John* something similar has been claimed, John being seen as the corrector of a too simple view of Jesus as a docetic figure, a worker of signs, but there is too much uncertainty here for us to offer any assured conclusions.<sup>22</sup>

## 5. Historical conclusions

We have now surveyed the evidence relative to the positions of the writers of the New Testament. What have we found?

1. We have found that *teaching regarded by them as false was extremely common*. In nearly every book of the New Testament this has been evident. The significance of this must not be over-estimated. Van Unnik has rightly observed that we must not seek heresy everywhere as the determinative factor in the composition of the New Testament.<sup>23</sup> Alongside the need to combat it there was what is probably more important, the proclamation of the gospel. 'The development of the earliest church was not set in motion by the almost unbridgeable tensions between Christians, but by the positive task of being witnesses of Jesus Christ in a world whose demands continually summoned them to provide answers.' Nevertheless, it is clear that from New Testament times the New Testament writers were conscious of rivalry and teaching opposed to their own.

2. There is a *development* in the presence of false teaching. The New Testament writings reflect an early stage in which the church was formulating its attitude on the question of circumcision and the Mosaic law. But from Galatians onwards Paul regards that issue as settled, and is intolerant of any who impose Jewish legalism on Gentiles. He does not object to Jews keeping up their own practices, although on the whole he thinks them unnecessary and a source of possible danger. But from the period of his letters onwards various types of problems arise. (a) There is *sheer rivalry* in the proclamation of the gospel. This Paul was prepared to put up with, but he drew the line when his own mission and apostolate were called in question. (b) There was *unethical behaviour*, which Paul condemned, especially if it arose from false teaching. (c) There was the possibility of Christians being *misled* as a result of pagan ideas, through lack of Christian instruction, through false deductions from the gospel. (d) There was the possibility of *teaching which differed from Paul's understanding* of the gospel. This included Judaizing, which jeopardized faith in Christ, and antinomianism, which went contrary to Paul's understanding of the nature of the new life in Christ. There may have been erroneous views of the work of the Spirit, especially in relation to spiritual gifts, and false views of the death and resurrection of Jesus. *Another Jesus, another gospel, another Spirit*—these three phrases sum up the dangers faced by Paul. This was how he saw heresy. Similar dangers are found in the other New Testament writings.

3. *Paul's method* of treatment varied. Sometimes he was simply warning his churches against possible influences, and we do not learn much about the character of the problems faced. At other times, the error seems to have got a firmer hold on the church. Then there may be a full-scale argument to show its falsity, as in Galatians, or a restatement of doctrine, as in Colossians. There is appeal to the nature of Christian experience, to the gospel as he preached it, and as he had received it, and to his own calling. Those who persist in false teaching may be removed from fellowship in the church. The church needs to appoint teachers who will stand firmly in the succession of sound doctrine and themselves be apt to teach others.

Now if this survey is sound, it shows that certain people in the first century, namely the writers of the New Testament, were conscious of the existence of opinions different from their own in the church, that they wrote and used other means to state or show that they were incompatible with the gospel which they believed themselves to have inherited,

<sup>19</sup> T. J. Weeden, *Mark—Traditions in Conflict* (Philadelphia, 1971).

<sup>20</sup> N. Perrin, *A Modern Pilgrimage in New Testament Christology* (Philadelphia, 1974), pp. 84-93.

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and that certain groups of people were regarded by them as deviationists and were excluded from the church or took themselves off to form their own groups. And this in my opinion is evidence that Bauer's thesis does not work when it is applied to the first century. Smalley's version of it with regard to John cannot be applied to the rest of the New Testament, and I am doubtful whether it is true even of John. For Bauer said in effect that there was considerable variety of belief in the early church, and that what later came to be regarded as orthodoxy was not conscious of being such at first, nor were there clear boundaries between different sorts of Christian belief, nor was what later came to be regarded as orthodox necessarily first on the ground. But the only valid point in this is that *there was variety of belief in the first century*. The New Testament writers one and all regard themselves as upholders of the truth of the gospel, and they often see quite clearly where the lines of what is compatible with the gospel and what is not compatible are to be drawn. And while it is possible that in some places the beginnings of Christianity came from people later regarded as heretical, it is not the case that orthodoxy was a later development.

## 6. Areas for further exploration

What factors might be placed over against this conclusion?

1. Basically, there is the question whether the New Testament writers were in fact in such agreement that any one of them would have recognized any other as 'sound in the faith'. Did James think that Paul was sound? If Paul had read Revelation, would he have agreed with it? Did John write his Gospel because he thought the others needed correction or even supersession, and did any of the other Gospel writers think the same way? These questions cannot be given a facile answer in the brief space left at my disposal, but I make bold to say that they would have recognized one another as brothers and colleagues in the defence of the gospel.

2. What were the groups criticized by the New Testament writers as heretical really like? Until a sort of first century Nag Hammadi library comes to light, this question cannot be fully answered. But it may be worth noting that when the Nag Hammadi library was first discovered, H. Chadwick expressed his opinion that it would not cause any major alteration in our assessment of the nature of Gnosticism as we had learned it from the church fathers who wrote against it. The same may well be true of the New Testament. Thus I find no reason to doubt that Paul was justified in his

accusations of immorality against those who rejected his gospel. Did such people regard themselves as the defenders of truth? We have seen that some did, but this reinforces the view that the idea of orthodoxy was prevalent in the first century.

3. How did such groups regard persons like Paul or John? Were they regarded as heretical, if so, by whom? and in such cases how do we decide which was right? Was Diotrophes the defender of 'orthodoxy' against the Elder? The church's answer was to canonize Paul and John, and not their opponents. But how did the situation seem during their period of ministry? One answer is that Paul evidently had some respect for the Jerusalem church, and he wanted to have its assurance that he was not, as he puts it, running in vain. But he was accepted by it, and could build on that fact. It was to the apostles that appeal was made. And if a Peter or Barnabas could deviate from Paul on occasion, it was only temporary and an inevitable risk during the growing period. There must undoubtedly have been a growing period during which the situation was flexible and ideas were not hard and fast, but some basic essentials were probably settled quite early, certainly earlier than Bauer suggests.

4. Perhaps the biggest problem concerns the relations between the various groups which lie behind the New Testament writers. There is the problem of the relation between Hebrews and Hellenists in the Jerusalem church, and the whole question of Jewish-orientated and Gentile-orientated types of Christians. This has been stressed by U. Wilckens in an essay discussing the place of Jesus-traditions in the church; he suggests that there were two communities, one passing on these traditions, and the other comparatively unaffected by them; the one orientated to the earthly Jesus, the other to the exalted Christ. These were later brought together, but at first there were in effect two quite different types of Christianity.<sup>24</sup>

Somewhat similar is the attempt of H. Koester to show that there were four different types of Gospel material in the early church, effecting different christologies. These were (1) the collection of *sayings of Jesus*, assembled by those who thought that the essence of Christianity was to perpetuate the teaching of Jesus as a teacher of wisdom. (2) The *aretalogy*, presenting Jesus as a divine man who performed supernatural actions. (3) The *revelation*, in which the risen Jesus gives esoteric instruction to his disciples. (4) The *kerygma* of the death and resurrection of Jesus

<sup>24</sup> U. Wilckens, 'Jesusüberlieferung und Christuskerygma — zwei Wege urchristlicher Überlieferungsgeschichte', *Theologia Viatorum* 10 (1965-1966), pp. 310-339.

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2. What were the groups criticized by the New Testament writers as heretical really like? Until a sort of first century Nag Hammadi library comes to light, this question cannot be fully answered. But it may be worth noting that when the Nag Hammadi library was first discovered, H. Chadwick expressed his opinion that it would not cause any major alteration in our assessment of the nature of Gnosticism as we had learned it from the church fathers who wrote against it. The same may well be true of the New Testament. Thus I find no reason to doubt that Paul was justified in his

accusations of immorality against those who rejected his gospel. Did such people regard themselves as the defenders of truth? We have seen that some did, but this reinforces the view that the idea of orthodoxy was prevalent in the first century.

3. How did such groups regard persons like Paul or John? Were they regarded as heretical, if so, by whom? and in such cases how do we decide which was right? Was Diotrophes the defender of 'orthodoxy' against the Elder? The church's answer was to canonize Paul and John, and not their opponents. But how did the situation seem during their period of ministry? One answer is that Paul evidently had some respect for the Jerusalem church, and he wanted to have its assurance that he was not, as he puts it, running in vain. But he was accepted by it, and could build on that fact. It was to the apostles that appeal was made. And if a Peter or Barnabas could deviate from Paul on occasion, it was only temporary and an inevitable risk during the growing period. There must undoubtedly have been a growing period during which the situation was flexible and ideas were not hard and fast, but some basic essentials were probably settled quite early, certainly earlier than Bauer suggests.

4. Perhaps the biggest problem concerns the relations between the various groups which lie behind the New Testament writers. There is the problem of the relation between Hebrews and Hellenists in the Jerusalem church, and the whole question of Jewish-orientated and Gentile-orientated types of Christians. This has been stressed by U. Wilckens in an essay discussing the place of Jesus-traditions in the church; he suggests that there were two communities, one passing on these traditions, and the other comparatively unaffected by them; the one orientated to the earthly Jesus, the other to the exalted Christ. These were later brought together, but at first there were in effect two quite different types of Christianity.<sup>24</sup>

Somewhat similar is the attempt of H. Koester to show that there were four different types of Gospel material in the early church, effecting different christologies. These were (1) the collection of *sayings of Jesus*, assembled by those who thought that the essence of Christianity was to perpetuate the teaching of Jesus as a teacher of wisdom. (2) The *aretalogy*, presenting Jesus as a divine man who performed supernatural actions. (3) The *revelation*, in which the risen Jesus gives esoteric instruction to his disciples. (4) The *kerygma* of the death and resurrection of Jesus

<sup>24</sup> U. Wilckens, 'Jesusüberlieferung und Christuskerygma — zwei Wege urchristlicher Überlieferungsgeschichte', *Theologia Viatorum* 10 (1965-1966), pp. 310-339.

historicized into a narrative form. Our canonical Gospels represent to some extent corrections of these earlier outlooks—a feature we have already noticed in the case of Mark.<sup>25</sup>

The question would then be how far these different points of view represented varieties of Christian belief, and how far they required the rejection of other points of view as heretical. But a more basic question would be how far this is a correct analysis of the position in the early church, and I would suggest that Koester's view is in fact a misleading description of the situation. This point cannot be developed in detail here. But if Koester's view contains elements of truth, it poses questions for us.

These four problems indicate that I have not provided all the answers to the historical questions posed by orthodoxy and heresy in New Testament times. None of them, however, is sufficient in my opinion to call in question my basic thesis, namely that the first-century church was conscious of the difference between orthodoxy and heresy, and that from an early date there was a body of belief which could be regarded as apostolic and orthodox.

## 7. The theological consequences

I have left myself no space to discuss the theological and contemporary significance of the material we have been discussing. It must suffice simply to pose some questions that arise.

1. We have travelled thus far without raising the basic question of what we are talking about. *What in fact is heresy?* It is dangerous to work with undefined terms. W. Bauer at one point speaks of a heretic as 'a fellow Christian concerning whom one is convinced that his divergent stance with regard to the faith bars him from the path of salvation.'<sup>26</sup> That is perhaps an extreme definition. At the opposite extreme there have been those who regard any deviation from their particular brand of Christianity as heresy. I can think of one distinguished writer on baptism who certainly came near to thinking that anybody who had doubts about the validity of infant baptism ought not to be a candidate for the ministry in his particular denomination. Somewhere in between these extremes there may be the idea of heresy as teaching which is regarded as contrary to the basic confession of the church in some central point or points, such that the confession is endangered by it.

2. A second question concerns *the rise of heresy*. H. Koester suggests that it arises from two possible dangers: either the time-bound historical shaping of the Christian revelation was absolutized and the quality of revelation was credited to a temporary form, or as a result of the consciousness that the revelation had a supra-historical quality, the link with its historical origin was surrendered, and foreign ideas were able to claim admission.<sup>27</sup> One might see Judaizing as an example of the first of these dangers and Gnosticizing as an example of the second. The question then arises as to whether heresies in general can be subsumed most fruitfully under these two headings.

3. The early church took up *a stance against heresy*, and in some cases acted against heretics. Does this provide a pattern for the church today to follow? In a brief article written at the time of the Pike controversy, J. Macquarrie suggested that the category of heresy was no longer applicable in the church today. Christianity can exist in a variety of forms, and the lines between orthodoxy and heresy cannot be drawn sharply. Excommunication for heresy is no longer a viable possibility, especially when today's heresy may become tomorrow's orthodoxy.<sup>28</sup>

This approach certainly suggests the need for caution, but it may well be that it does not take the New Testament seriously enough. For the essence of heresy is that it presents itself as a form of the real thing, as distinct from, say, an atheistic position which is confessedly anti-Christian, and therefore it presents the greater danger to the faith since, from the point of view of orthodoxy, error is masquerading as truth. A church which takes its confession seriously must surely be prepared to speak out against what it believes to be error, and if necessary to discipline those who profess to uphold its confession while effectively denying or contradicting it. A confessional church has a right and necessity to do so. Whether the same thing is possible in a non-confessional church may be more difficult to argue; perhaps indeed it is an argument against a non-confessional church that it is unable to apply the categories of orthodoxy and heresy.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> H. Koester, 'The Theological Aspects of Primitive Christian Heresy', in J. M. Robinson (ed.), *The Future of our Religious Past* (London, 1971), pp. 65-83.

<sup>28</sup> J. Macquarrie, *Thinking about God* (London, 1975), pp. 44-45.

<sup>29</sup> For a survey of heresy in the New Testament see H. Koester, 'Häretiker im Urchristentum', in *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, III 3, cols 17-21.

<sup>25</sup> H. Koester, 'One Jesus and Four Primitive Gospels', *HTR* 61 (1968), pp. 203-247; reprinted in H. Koester and J. M. Robinson, *op. cit.*

<sup>26</sup> W. Bauer, *op. cit.*, pp. 234f.



# Why were the Montanists condemned?

David F Wright

*Continuing with the theme of 'Heresy', this article (also first presented at the Dunblane Conference in 1975) offers a case-history of an early Christian movement which was widely condemned as heretical, but which had much in common with some prominent emphases in church life today. David Wright, one of our Associate Editors, is Senior Lecturer in Ecclesiastical History at the University of Edinburgh, and was the first editor of Themelios.*

*Damnatio memoriae* is both the fate of the heretic and the frustration of the historian. The history of Montanism suffers from the loss of both Montanist and anti-Montanist writings. Most of the extant sayings of Montanus and his colleagues Prisca (Priscilla) and Maximilla are preserved for us by Epiphanius, the late fourth-century heresiologist. The surviving oracles amount in all to no more than twenty.<sup>1</sup> Hippolytus of Rome, writing in the early third century, speaks of 'boundless books' by the Montanists, although the primitive Roman 'index' in the Gelasian Decree (fifth/sixth century) knows only 'some minor works', *opuscula* (*Sources*, pp. 57, 226). Detailed evidence of Montanist writings is not plentiful, and they have all disappeared with remarkably little trace. Several works written by Tertullian in his Montanist period are of strictly limited value; their more or less incidental references to Montanist *differentiae* would pale into insignificance had the world not lost his 'seven books written against the church in defence of Montanus', as Jerome somewhat tendentiously describes his *On Ecstasy* (*Sources*, p. 171).

More extensive remains of Montanist works would no doubt be extant if catholic refutations had displayed a greater aptitude for survival. The disappearance of so many of the latter is far more surprising than the loss of the former, and is perhaps without parallel in the early church. (It may even merit an explanation bearing upon the story of Montanism.) Eusebius was much better

off, having at his disposal 'the amplest supply of historical material' (*HE* 5:16:1), from which he preserved invaluable extracts from the works of 'the Anonymous', a contemporary of Montanus, and Apollonius, who wrote some four decades later, about 210. But the list of lost catholic ripostes to the New Prophecy (the self-designation of 'the Montanists'—a title not attested before the middle and late fourth century; cf. *Sources*, pp. 89, 153) is much longer, including writings by Miltiades, Alcibiades, Claudius Apollinarius, Rhodo, Soter, Eleutherus, Melito, Gaius, Serapion and Clement of Alexandria, as well as the monarchical heretic Praxeas.

One consequence of this paucity of documentary evidence is uncertainty why the Montanists were condemned, as undoubtedly they were by the bishops of the province of Asia. The Anonymous records that 'When the faithful throughout Asia had met frequently and at many places in Asia for this purpose, and on examination of the new-fangled teachings had pronounced them profane and rejected the heresy, these persons were thus expelled from the Church' (Eusebius, *HE* 5:16:10). Similar action may well have been taken in other regions of Asia Minor and even further east (cf. Serapion of Antioch's letter 'exposing the same heresy' and bearing numerous episcopal signatures, *ibid.* 5:19:2-4). The synods of Iconium and Synnada (in eastern Phrygia), which about the year 230 resolved that Montanist baptisms were futile and Montanists had to be (re)baptized into the catholic church, probably spoke for most of Asia Minor if not beyond (*Sources*, pp. 62, 65; Eusebius, *HE* 7:7:5). In the western church the official fortunes of the movement are less clear. The adverse judgments of the Roman bishops, whether Soter and Eleutherus or their successor (Victor? Zephyrinus?) whom Praxeas persuaded to 'put to flight the Paraclete', apparently did not amount to formal censure or excommunication (*Sources*, pp. 43f.; Eusebius, *HE* 5:3:4-4:2). The brethren in Gaul represented by Irenaeus were not inhibited from advocating a more sympathetic attitude than Rome, and the African bishops appear to have felt no obligation or pressure to expel Tertullian and others who espoused the New Prophecy. Indeed, the grounds for speaking of a straightforward

<sup>1</sup> Most are collected in English in R. M. Grant, *Second-Century Christianity* (London, 1946), pp. 95f. and E. Hennecke, W. Schneemelcher and R. McL. Wilson, *New Testament Apocrypha*, II (London, 1965), pp. 686f. P. de Labriolle, *Les Sources de l'Histoire du Montanisme* (Fribourg, 1913), hereafter cited as *Sources*, does not present them at one place.

schism of Tertullian's group from the Carthaginian church are much less clearcut than is often assumed. A weighty case has recently been made out for the view that in his lifetime, and most likely until after Cyprian's episcopate, the Tertullianists remained a Holy Club within the catholic church, *ecclesiola in ecclesia*, neither excommunicated nor excommunicating.<sup>2</sup>

### 1. Allegations of monarchianism

Eusebius's extracts from the Anonymous provide no precise information concerning the terms of the Asian synods' verdict against the Cataphrygians, as their catholic opponents regularly called the Montanists. If later writers are to be believed, the Montanists presented an open-and-shut case of heretical error. In the later fourth century the opinion prevailed that their chief fault lay in their monarchianism, that is, their rejection of permanent personal distinctions between Father, Son and Spirit in the Godhead. The Council of Constantinople in 381 condemned Montanists in these terms (canon 7), and Jerome placed their Sabellian (*i.e.*, monarchian) breach of the 'rule of faith' at the head of his catalogue of their aberrations (*Sources*, pp. 167-168). Didymus the Blind of Alexandria (died *c.* 398) did likewise in explaining why the church refused to recognize Montanist baptisms. Didymus mistakenly appealed to a prophetic utterance of Montanus, 'I am the Father and the Son and the Paraclete', while Basil of Caesarea even supposed that the 'Pepuzians' baptized in the threefold name of Father, Son and Montanus or Priscilla (*Sources*, pp. 155f., 113). Basil's predecessor in Caesarea in the mid-third century, Firmilian, attributed the Iconium synod's disapproval of Montanist baptisms to the bishops' judgment that the Cataphrygians' error concerning the Spirit automatically robbed them also of their possession of Father and Son (*Sources*, p. 61).

Yet Firmilian could not conceal the synod's acknowledgment that the New Prophecy seemed to acknowledge the same Father and Son as the catholic church. Indeed, any connection between Montanism and the various brands of monarchianism was only accidental; there was no inherent affinity between the two. This is not to deny that some Montanists in the late second or early third century (and perhaps more in the later decades, finding themselves impelled into more blatant

heterodoxy by repeated ecclesiastical and secular ostracism) were guilty of monarchian error. Hippolytus of Rome charged some of them with being Noetians (from Noetus of Smyrna, one of the earliest Monarchian teachers), and the treatise *Against All Heresies* ascribed wrongly to Tertullian, which is probably based on Hippolytus's lost *Syntagma* against heresies, divided Montanists into two camps, one headed by Aeschines who asserted that Christ was both Father and Son (*Sources*, pp. 58, 51). But Hippolytus accepted that in the main the Montanists were orthodox regarding the Father and Son, a verdict that was extended to cover the Spirit also by Epiphanius, a later writer dependent on much earlier sources (*Sources*, pp. 57, 115).

It must not be forgotten that monarchian beliefs enjoyed a great vogue around the turn of the second and third centuries. Their refutation engaged the full vigour of giants like Origen and... the Montanist Tertullian! Was not Praxeas, the arch-monarchian demolished by Tertullian in his most significant work on the Trinity, the very one who had at Rome not only 'introduced heresy' but also 'banished (the New) Prophecy'? Tertullian is unequivocal that Montanus and his associates were not condemned for any transgression of the 'rule of faith and hope', and professes that the direction of the Paraclete commits him ever more confidently to his exposition of the Trinity. Tertullian records a prophetic oracle which is entirely catholic: 'God brought forth the Word as a root brings forth a tree, and a spring a river and the sun a ray' (*Sources*, pp. 44, 37, 45). 'Tertullian helped to rescue the catholic church from theological heresy precisely because he was a Montanist' (Barnes, *op. cit.*, p. 142). Most decisively of all, the primary critics of Montanus and the prophetesses cited by Eusebius are silent about any heretical notions concerning the Father and the Son; Eusebius's failure to quote them on this subject argues their own lack of reference to it.

### 2. Ecstasy and frenzy

What faults, then, do Eusebius's chief sources find with the Montanists? Are they such as to explain their rejection as heretics? The Anonymous accuses Montanus of 'prophesying contrary to the manner which the church had received from generation to generation by tradition from the beginning.' 'He fell into a state of possession, as it were, and abnormal ecstasy, insomuch that he became frenzied and began to babble and utter strange sounds.' The two women 'chattered in a frenzied, inopportune and unnatural fashion' (Eusebius,

<sup>2</sup> Douglas Powell, 'Tertullianists and Cataphrygians', *Vigiliae Christianae* 29 (1975), pp. 33-54. Cf. G. Salmon in *Dictionary of Christian Biography*, III (London, 1882), p. 944; T. D. Barnes, *Tertullian* (Oxford, 1971), pp. 42-47.

HE 5:16:7, 9). Appealing to another writer Alcibiades, who had demonstrated that a prophet ought not to speak in ecstasy, the Anonymous claims that the New Prophecy 'cannot indicate any prophet under either the Old or the New [Covenant] who was moved by the Spirit after this manner, neither Agabus nor Judas nor Silas nor the daughters of Philip nor Ammia in Philadelphia nor Quadratus' (*ibid.*, 5:17:1, 3).<sup>a</sup>

This line of attack was developed at great length by Jerome and Epiphanius (*Sources*, pp. 171, 175, 176, 179-180, 119-127). The latter seeks to demonstrate *seriatim* that 'every prophet in the Old and New Testaments knew what he was saying' and 'spoke in full possession of his senses'. He also examines the occurrences of the word *ekstasis* in the Greek Bible, evidently countering Montanist appeals to these precedents. His argument is not inconsistent with his subsequent scrutiny of the content of the Montanist prophecies by comparison with the teaching of Scripture. His treatment implies what the account of the Anonymous does not obviously allow for, that ecstasy may issue in the utterance of comprehensible, meaningful messages. There was clearly more to Montanist prophecy than unintelligible *glössolalia*, if that is what, *inter alia*, ecstasy denotes.

There can be little doubt that the allegation of ecstasy, however loosely advanced, sticks against the Montanists. Two questions must then be faced. In the first place, was ecstasy unknown in the prophetic tradition? Modern Old Testament scholarship is unlikely to endorse Epiphanius's case without qualification, even with respect to the major writing prophets. Possession by the Spirit or the Logos likened to the playing of a musical instrument is predicated of biblical prophets by orthodox writers from the second century onwards,<sup>4</sup> in full harmony with Montanus's celebrated utterance, 'Beheld, man is a lyre, and I hover over (rush upon) him like a plectrum,' which Epiphanius stigmatized as wholly alien to the prophetic Spirit. The New English Bible's rendering of *glössolalia* as 'ecstatic utterance' indicates that the Anonymous and perhaps also the Asian bishops may have been on shaky ground in supposing that Christian prophets never spoke in ecstasy. The second question that arises here simply asks whether the manner in which Montanus prophesied could really have loomed as large as the Anonymous

suggests. At this early stage there was apparently no attempt to damn the New Prophecy by alleging that Montanus had been involved in frenzied Phrygian religion. One wonders whether concentration on prophetic style points to a deeper discord.

### 3. Martyrdom

The endeavours of the Anonymous to demonstrate the falsity of the New Prophecy entangle him in self-contradiction on the issue of martyrdom. His rhetorical question whether the Montanists' ranks have produced a single martyr reflects the widespread view of Christian antiquity that martyrdom is a signal manifestation of the life of the Spirit, a view which has roots in the Revelation of John and multiple ramifications in the primitive church. After thus assuming that the Montanists' lack of martyrs exposes the hollowness of their pretensions to the Spirit, however, the Anonymous later undercuts the appeal to the martyrs by acknowledging that the Marcionites, for instance, have numerous martyrs, 'yet surely we shall not for this reason give them our assent, nor acknowledge that they possess the truth' (Eusebius, HE 5:16:10, 20-22). This 'Heads I win, tails you lose' form of argument is a plain admission that the Montanists cannot be faulted on the score of martyrdom, even if, as later African experience may suggest, attitudes to persecution and martyrdom could have featured among the charges at the Asian synods.

There is in reality abundant evidence to show that the New Prophecy was anything but lukewarm on this front. Tertullian believed that the Paraclete summoned men to martyrdom and condemned *Flight in Persecution* as well as the evasion of any rightful action which might incur punishment (*cf. The Soldier's Garland*). Two Montanist oracles preserved by Tertullian are exhortations to endure gladly the reproaches of persecutors and to hope for a death not 'in bed or in abortion or in languishing fevers but in martyrdom, that he who suffered for you may be glorified'. The martyrs at Lyons in 177 almost certainly included some influenced by Montanism, as the narrative suggests in the case of Vettius Epagathus: 'Having confessed in a very clear voice, he also attained to the inheritance of the martyrs, being called the paraclete of the Christians, but having the Paraclete in himself, the Spirit of Zacharias (Lk 1: 67), which Spirit he showed in the fullness of his love, in that he was well pleased to lay down even his own life for the defence of the brethren' (Eusebius, HE 5:1:10). Furthermore, epitaphs recovered from one part of Phrygia reveal a boldness and explicitness in

<sup>a</sup> Note that the Anonymous does not differentiate between biblical and post-biblical prophets under the New Covenant.

<sup>4</sup> *Cf. G. W. H. Lampe, A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford, 1968), s.vv. *lura*, *organon* (2), *plēktron*.

confessing Christianity which are elsewhere unexampled in tombstone inscriptions in the pre-Constantinian era. The location points to a Montanist community. A literary tradition represented by the Philadelphian letters of John and Ignatius commends to Christians in the same area steadfastness in persecution until the End.<sup>5</sup>

#### 4. Prophecy—fulfilment and succession

For the Anonymous catholic writer the spurious character of the New Prophecy is further demonstrated by the non-fulfilment of specific predictions. Maximilla had foretold 'wars and tumults', but she had been dead thirteen years and 'there has been neither a partial nor a universal war in the world' (Eusebius, *HE* 5:16:18). Maximilla also predicted according to Epiphanius, 'After me there will be no more prophecy, but the consummation.' As the years 'after Maximilla' elapsed, the emptiness of her expectations became more and more patent. But how long an interval had to intervene before non-fulfilment could have been alleged in conciliar proceedings? It is unlikely to have functioned as an indictment in the earliest anti-Montanist measures.

Maximilla's prediction of the cessation of prophecy, perhaps uttered towards the end of her life in response to an imminent break in the prophetic line (*cf.* Powell, *art. cit.*, p. 43), was not in itself at variance with the criterion established by the Anonymous: 'The apostle lays it down that the prophetic gift ought to continue in the whole church until the final coming.' It was not only the delay of the End but also conjointly the failure of the prophetic succession that exposed the falsehood. None of the catholic writers, it should be noted, claimed that the prophetic gift no longer belonged in the church. Origen, Epiphanius and Jerome all assert in different ways the church's recognition of the authentic charisma of prophecy (*cf.* *Sources*, pp. 55-56, 116, 167). After showing a proprietary interest in the earlier Asian prophets the Montanists were merely hoist with their own petard when they were unable to maintain the succession (*cf.* Eusebius, *HE* 5:17:4).

#### 5. The fruits of the prophet

We have exhausted the specific allegations of the Anonymous writer against the New Prophecy as recorded by Eusebius. The extracts from Apollonius, who, Eusebius informs us, wrote four decades after Montanus began to prophesy, *i.e.* c. 212, and may therefore be describing partly later

developments, amount largely to an exposé of the conduct of various Montanist figures (Eusebius, *HE* 5:18:1-11). The argument is based on the axiom that a prophet is known by the fruits of a prophet, which accords with the *Didache's* recommendations for distinguishing between the true prophet and the false. (Apollonius may have the *Didache* in mind in asserting that Scripture forbids a prophet to receive gifts and money.) But it is doubtful whether much weight should be attached to Apollonius's colourful allegations, any more than to the more outrageous charges, including child-sacrifice, levelled against the Montanists from the time of Cyril of Jerusalem, who described Montanus himself as 'full of impiety and inhumanity . . . reeking of every impurity and licentiousness' (*Sources*, p. 89; *cf.* pp. 138f., 151, 189 for Epiphanius, Filaster and Augustine).

There would of course be nothing unusual in self-seeking charlatans and showmen taking advantage of an enthusiastic movement like Montanism. If we may believe pagan critics like Lucian and Celsus, Montanists were not the only second-century Christians to offer fair game to impostors on the make,<sup>6</sup> while long before Cyril of Jerusalem's day cannibalistic and incestuous mysteries were charged against Christians indiscriminately. The Anonymous as reported by Eusebius lays no moral failings to the Montanists' account, Tertullian does not bother to rebut the kind of accusations Apollonius makes, while Hippolytus mentions only their ascetic regulations (*Sources*, pp. 57f.). Apollonius briefly notices their demanding fasts and their 'dissolutions of marriages', which were a common feature of the encratite varieties of second- and probably first-century Christianity. Some of Apollonius's objections may be directed against nothing more blameworthy than 'a financial scheme for regularising offerings to the Church and apostolic maintenance for preachers' (Powell, *art. cit.*, pp. 50f.). It is both disappointing and suggestive that Apollonius should have concentrated so much fire on this front. If there were Montanist rascals and dilettantes, there were also ethical rigorists like Tertullian and heroic martyrs like Perpetua and Felicitas.

The directness of the Anonymous and Apollonius in specifying the Montanists' failings we have considered thus far contrasts markedly with their vagueness concerning their fundamental heterodoxy. They speak generally of 'heresy' and 'new-fangled teachings', of the falsity of the New Prophecy's predictions and the prophets' blas-

<sup>5</sup> *Cf.* W. M. Calder, 'Philadelphia and Montanism', *BJRL* 7 (1923), pp. 309-354.

<sup>6</sup> *Cf.* J. Stevenson, *A New Eusebius* (London, 1957), pp. 133-136, 140.

phemy against the church for refusing to recognize their charismata. But they drop no hint of extravagant claims on the part of Montanus to a special relationship to, if not identity with, the Paraclete. (In the context it is Eusebius who refers to 'the Paraclete Montanus', *HE* 5:14.)

## 6. The Paraclete in the prophets

The success of Montanus and the prophetesses in attracting a following is granted by the Anonymous, in conformity with the exaggerated personal prominence given to the trio in virtually all the sources. Hippolytus's chief complaint is the Montanists' excessive reliance upon these three leaders: 'They allege that they have learned something more through these than from the law, prophets and Gospels. . . . They magnify the women above the apostles and every gift of grace, so that some presume to assert in them a something superior to Christ. . . . They attach themselves more to the speeches of Montanus than to the Gospels.' Yet of the trio themselves Hippolytus merely says that Montanus was considered a prophet and that the Paraclete Spirit had departed into (come into, *kechōrēkenai*) Maximilla and Priscilla, which does not go beyond a biblical model of prophetic indwelling by the Spirit (*Sources*, pp. 57–59).

Heterodox claims about the Holy Spirit first come to light in Pseudo-Tertullian's *Against All Heresies*, which, as we have noted, is probably indebted to a lost work by Hippolytus. The common blasphemy of the Montanists asserted that 'the Holy Spirit but not the Paraclete was in the apostles. The Paraclete said more things in Montanus than Christ set forth in the Gospel—not only more, but better and greater' (*Sources*, p. 51). Here we have a distinction between the Spirit in the apostles and the Paraclete in the (Montanist) prophets, which does not, however, reappear in Epiphanius's extended examination of Montanist prophecies, although he too is commonly believed to have used Hippolytus's lost *Syntagma* among other early sources. The nearest Epiphanius comes to recording such aberrant pretensions occurs in his citation of Montanus's utterances, 'I am the Lord God Almighty dwelling in man,' and, 'I am neither angel nor envoy, but I, the Lord God, the Father, it is I who have come.'

These oracles, together with a third, 'I am the Father and the Son and the Paraclete,' raise in an acute form the question of the first-person structure of several of the Montanist sayings. When Montanus said, 'I am the Lord God . . .' was he doing anything more outrageous than assuming a prophetic

stance familiar from the Old Testament, perhaps without the preface 'Thus says the Lord'? That he was misunderstood to be laying claim to some unique relationship to the Paraclete, the divine person as whose mouthpiece he must most often have spoken, suggests that Christian prophecy was not normally presented in this form, although it would be difficult to imagine that it never took this form.<sup>7</sup>

## 7. Montanist Scriptures?

The concentration of the Montanists on the designation 'Paraclete' for the Holy Spirit is readily intelligible in terms of the *future* role assigned by Jesus to the promised Paraclete in John's Gospel. Tertullian explains at considerable length what he understands by the Paraclete's making known through the New Prophecy 'more, yea greater and better things' than in Christ. It is immediately obvious that it has nothing to do with supplementing the rule of faith, or presenting new revelation.<sup>8</sup> It belongs more to development of ethics than of doctrine. Tertullian provides no basis whatsoever for the popular misconception that the New Prophecy threatened the apostolic Scriptures by canonizing freshly revealed doctrine, and there are inadequate grounds for it elsewhere in our sources. The Montanist rank and file may have been guilty of extravagant reverence for the teachings of their prophetic leaders, treasuring them and even appearing to exalt them above the Scriptures themselves. A similar attitude to human teachers is observable in first-century Corinth, in twentieth-century evangelical church life and no doubt in every intervening century. It does not justify the ascription to Montanus, Priscilla and Maximilla of claims that their prophecies should enjoy parity with or pre-eminence over the apostolic writings.<sup>9</sup> Apollonius accuses Themiso, possibly successor to Montanus as head of the movement, of 'aping the apostle by daring to compose a catholic epistle', but in itself this was hardly a criminal offence. The eminently orthodox Dionysius of Corinth wrote several, and since his 'catholic

<sup>7</sup> Cf H. B. Swete, *The Holy Spirit in the Ancient Church* (London, 1912), p. 70; Powell, *art. cit.*, p. 51.

<sup>8</sup> 'The rule of faith is irreformable.' He denies that 'the Paraclete has taught any such thing as can be changed with novelty in opposition to catholic tradition', and argues that the Paraclete is recognized by his 'emphatic witness to Christ together with the whole order of God the Creator', and that the integrity of his preaching 'on the ground of the cardinal rule of faith commands credit' for his prophecies (*Sources*, pp. 12f., 30f.).

<sup>9</sup> See F. E. Vokes, 'The Use of Scripture in the Montanist Controversy', *Studia Evangelica*, V (*Texte und Untersuchungen*, 103; Berlin, 1968), ed. F. L. Cross, pp. 317–320.

epistles' were letters addressed to individual Christian communities, Clement, Ignatius, Polycarp and many others had also written some (Eusebius, *HE* 5:18:5, 4:23:1-12). The 'fear and extreme caution' which held back the Anonymous from writing down his refutation of the New Prophecy, 'lest perchance I might seem to be adding a new article or clause to the word of the New Covenant of the Gospel, to which no one who has purposed to live according to the simple Gospel may add, from which no one may take away', have often been interpreted as anxiety not to appear to commit the same offence as the Montanists (Eusebius, *HE* 5:16:3). If this were the case, one wonders what he thought of all the other second-century Christians who wrote books, such as his contemporaries Miltiades and Alcibiades, whose anti-Montanist treatises he knew (*ibid.*, 5:17:1). If the Anonymous' fear was well founded, the New Testament canon must have been still subject to boundless fluidity, which his own words here are normally understood to rule out (although, as we have noted, when listing 'those who prophesied under the New Covenant' he makes no distinction between prophets in the New Testament and in later decades). If his fear was unreal, he can hardly be taken as a reliable witness to the intentions of the Montanist prophets.

The Muratorian Canon debar books by Miltiades, perhaps the Montanist mentioned by the Anonymous, and Montanus, if the text may be depended upon,<sup>10</sup> and the Roman writer Gaius sought in a disputation c. 210 to 'curb the audacity of the Montanists in composing new Scriptures' (Eusebius, *HE* 6:20:3). It defies reason to suppose, as Eusebius implies, that the Montanists were still, forty years after Montanus began to prophesy, producing 'new Scriptures'—unless, that is, they had only recently begun to do so. Gaius, it should be remembered, evinced such animosity against the New Prophecy that he ascribed the Johannine Gospel and Apocalypse, on which it heavily relied,

to the heretic Cerinthus (*cf.* Grant, *op. cit.*, pp. 104-108).

## 8. Jerusalem in Phrygia

Furthermore, if the Montanists expected the imminent descent of the New Jerusalem at an unimportant site in Phrygia, they are unlikely to have been concerned with providing Scriptures for the needs of the church. Whether they entertained such an expectation, however, is also more questionable than is normally imagined.<sup>11</sup> The descent of Jerusalem on Pepuza was declared in a vision seen by 'either Quintilla or Priscilla, I cannot precisely say which', reported by Epiphanius in his description of a group of Montanists which emerged out of the parent body, probably after the death of Montanus and perhaps also Maximilla (*Sources*, pp. 139f.). There is good reason to assign the vision to Quintilla, not one of the original trio. The translation of the saying is variable; it may speak of a present rather than a future descent. The former rendering would accord better with Apollonius's account of Montanus naming Pepuza and Tymion Jerusalem 'in his desire to gather to them people from all quarters' (Eusebius, *HE* 5:18:2). In view of the fact that, according to Quintilla, the descent takes place because Pepuza is holy, Montanus probably named the two towns 'not in the context of the heavenly Jerusalem, but rather in that of the Jerusalem of *Acts*—the re-creation of the highly organized but Spirit-directed primitive Church'. The important point is his designating the places 'Jerusalem' by virtue of their present character or function, whether in pious or self-important advertisement or by pentecostal precedent,<sup>12</sup> rather than in the context of a future event. Tertullian adhered to the standard second-century expectation of the descent of the New Jerusalem in Palestine and believed the New Prophecy confirmed this hope.

Whether Montanism should be regarded as announcing the imminent parousia is not open to a simple answer. Maximilla, as we have seen, expected the consummation after her death, but presumably did not exclude some interval before it ensued. The various ways of dying which Montanus envisaged in encouraging the hope of

<sup>10</sup> Stevenson, *op. cit.*, p. 146. In *HTR* 66 (1973), pp. 1-41, A. C. Sundberg has made out a case for 'Canon Muratori: A Fourth-Century List' which calls for close scrutiny, even if some of his arguments, *e.g.*, on the meaning of *temporibus nostris*, fail to carry immediate conviction. The Canon's curious vagueness in excluding 'the Asian founder of the Cataphrygians' is more comprehensible in late second-century Rome than in the East in the fourth century. The whole paragraph on the rejected heretics has a primitive ring, *e.g.*, in its references to the obscure Arsinoüs and to Miltiades, if he is the Montanist leader mentioned elsewhere only by the Anonymous. In claiming that the Muratorian list is without parallel until Eusebius, Sundberg omits to consider the writer Gaius who espoused a closed three-Gospel collection and listed thirteen Pauline Epistles.

<sup>11</sup> For what follows see Powell, *art. cit.*, pp. 43-46.

<sup>12</sup> Montanus does not very readily fit a restitutionist model. It is noteworthy that all the later patristic authorities refer simply to Montanus' naming Pepuza (alone) Jerusalem. The received tradition fused Apollonius/Eusebius and Epiphanius, excluding both Tymion and the descent from above. Augustine records an explanation that Pepuza earned the title Jerusalem because it was where the trio lived. See *Sources*, pp. 89, 150, 189, 190, 212, 215, 241.

martyrdom did not include being overtaken by the coming of the Lord. The Fathers throw no further light on the subject. It would be reasonable to suppose that the Montanists nourished intensified eschatological hopes which at least, or perhaps solely, in Maximilla assumed broad chronological specification. In any case, it is again doubtful whether Montanist convictions about the time (or location) of the End could have significantly influenced the decisions of the Asian synods, although they could readily have contributed to a general impression of outrageous audacity.

### 9. Fanatical, not heretical

The conclusion imposes itself that 'in the early Montanist controversy scriptural or ecclesiastical criteria for condemnation of the movement were not easily to hand' (Vokes, *op. cit.*, p. 320). In a nutshell, the New Prophecy was fanatical rather than heretical.<sup>13</sup> By the style of their prophecy, the eccentricity of their ascetic demands, their pique at the catholic bishops' repudiation of their charismata and perhaps by facets of their personal demeanour and predominance, the prophetic trio displayed an overbearing self-importance of which bishops in the catholic church of that day could hardly fail to take notice. Their claim to be the organs of the Spirit's instructions to the church involved an imperious summons to recognition and obedience which bishops could not tolerate in a new convert and two women companions. The church of the 170's and 180's had reached a sensitive, even prickly, stage in its development. It was emerging from the confusions of the Gnostic crisis and recovering from the harsh confrontation with Marcion, but was still feeling after a clear consensus on the terms of its apostolic charter. If we read the Anonymous aright, it could be very touchy about the ark of the New Covenant Scriptures as its construction advanced. A magnetic revival of Christian prophecy<sup>14</sup> might divide rather than unite, foment excitement and disturbance when stability was the need of the hour.

Tertullian does not bother about 'meals of parched food (*xērophagia*) and repasts of radishes'

(Hippolytus; *Sources*, p. 57). His advocacy of the New Prophecy moves on a more sophisticated level,<sup>15</sup> and yet the Paraclete's perfecting of the discipline of the church requires not only unflinching acceptance of persecution but also the veiling of virgins, the redoubling of fasts, a total ban on remarriage and the slamming of the door of penitence against remission for serious post-baptismal sin. Such extremism was shocking rather than impious, and it provoked its own damnation ('three Lents instead of one', according to Jerome!).

### 10. 'Greater things'

But if the rejection of the New Prophecy in the late second and early third centuries is quite comprehensible, the judgment of hindsight may reckon it damaging and regrettable. The most attractive face of Montanism is glimpsed in the prologue and epilogue of the *Passion of Perpetua*, an eye-witness account of a group martyrdom at Carthage in 202:

'If the patterns of faith in ancient days bear witness to the grace of God and make for the edification of man, and for that reason have been collected in writing that their reading, rendering the events present, should honour God and strengthen man, why should not recent examples be collected in like manner, seeing that they serve both these ends equally well? Some day these too will become ancient in their turn and familiar to posterity—even if in the present they are accorded less esteem because of the prejudice that favours antiquity. But let note be taken by those who take account of different epochs in assessing the one (unchanging) power of the one (unchanging) Holy Spirit. It is the more recent happenings that are to be regarded as the greater, because they are last of all, in conformity with the superabundance of grace decreed for the final stages of the world's history. 'In the last days, says the Lord, I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh. . . .' And so we who recognize and honour alike the new prophecies and visions which were promised, and regard the other powers of the Spirit as sent for the better equipment of the Church (for which the same Spirit was sent to dispense all his gifts in all in accordance with the Lord's distribution to each man), we feel ourselves compelled to compile the facts and to provide that they shall be read to the glory of God, in order that a feeble or despairing faith may not suppose

<sup>13</sup> For a similar assessment of an enthusiastic movement cf. R. Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom* (London, 1975), p. 35: 'Messalianism was probably no sect, but a "movement", characteristic of Syrian asceticism, which (like Montanism before it and numerous medieval movements after it) laid too much stress on experience of the Spirit for the liking of ecclesiastics in the institutional Church.' Origen knew that some debated whether the Montanists were heretics or merely schismatics (*Sources*, p. 56).

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Schneemelcher in Hennecke, *etc.*, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 688f.

<sup>15</sup> Yet the differences between Phrygian and African Montanism have often been exaggerated, e.g., by H. J. Lawlor, 'The Heresy of the Phrygians', *JTS* 9 (1908), pp. 481-499. See Powell, *art. cit.*

that the grace of God dwelt only with the men of old time, whether in the glory of martyrs or of revelations. Whereas God is always working as he promised, for a testimony to those who do not believe and for the good and faithful. Therefore we too declare to you also what we have heard and seen and handled, brethren and little children, in order that you who were present may remember to the glory of the Lord, and you who learn through hearing the account may share communion with the holy martyrs.'

As the writer concludes in the epilogue,

'These new manifestations of virtue will bear witness to one and the same Spirit who still operates' (*Sources*, pp. 9-11; H. Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972, pp. 106-109, 130).

This narrative's vivid sense of the immediacy of the power of the Spirit in the contemporary church, no less, indeed greater than in the past, suffered the same fate as the New Prophecy. There is much in Tertullian to similar effect.

'What kind of supposition is it that, while the devil is always operating and adding daily to the ingenuities of iniquity, the work of God should either have ceased or else have desisted from advancing?'

The Paraclete prophesies even to the present day, not only of old.

'The reason why the Lord sent the Paraclete was that, since human mediocrity was unable to take in all things at once, discipline should, little by little, be directed and ordained and carried to perfection, by that vicar of the Lord, the Holy Spirit. [He cites John 6: 12-13, 14: 26.] What then is the Paraclete's administrative office but this: the direction of discipline, the revelation of the Scriptures, the re-formation of the intellect, the advancement towards the "better things"?' (*Sources*, pp. 13-15).

### 11. Impoverishment of the church

In testing such spirits and rejecting them, the spirits of the Fathers must themselves stand trial. The Montanists' renewal of prophecy suffered at the hands of a church preoccupied with closing the ranks, drawing clear lines of demarcation and safeguarding its heritage, an exercise in which apostolic was often synonymous with traditional. The condemnation of Montanism was a decisive point in the evolution of that kind of churchly Christianity which cherished office and order and had little room to 'welcome the charismata'. Despite the catholic writers' protestations that authentic spiritual gifts had the church's blessing, the life of the Spirit was for centuries, even millennia, to come to flow in well-regulated and largely clerical channels. The reaction against Montanism brought upon the church impoverishment more detrimental than the upset caused by the unbalanced excesses of the New Prophecy.