



ORTHODOXY AND HERESY
IN EARLY CHRISTIAN CONTEXTS

Reconsidering the Bauer Thesis

Edited by
PAUL A. HARTOG



Orthodoxy and Heresy
in Early Christian Contexts

James Clarke & Co

and

The Lutterworth Press

Click on the links above to see our full
catalogue for more excellent titles in
Hardback, Paperback, PDF and Epub!

*Orthodoxy and Heresy in
Early Christian Contexts*

ISBN: 978 0 227 90494 7

C

L

Would you like to join our Mailing List?

[Click here!](#)

Enjoyed this book? Why not review it on
Amazon so others can too?

[Click here!](#)

Orthodoxy and Heresy
in Early Christian Contexts
Reconsidering the Bauer Thesis

Edited by
Paul A. Hartog



James Clarke & Co

Dedicated to the memory of Rod Decker (1953–2014),
contributor and colleague

gloriosa in conspectu Domini mors sanctorum eius

James Clarke & Co

P.O. Box 60

Cambridge

CB1 2NT

United Kingdom

www.jamesclarke.co

publishing@jamesclarke.co

ISBN: 978 0 227 17539 2

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A record is available from the British Library

First published by James Clarke & Co, 2015

Copyright © Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2015

Published by arrangement with Pickwick Publications

Scripture quotations taken from the New American Standard Bible,
Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995
by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. (www.Lockman.org)

All rights reserved. No part of this edition may be reproduced, stored electronically
or in any retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic,
mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without prior written
permission from the Publisher (permissions@jamesclarke.co).

Contents

Preface | vii

List of Contributors | ix

Introduction | 1

—*Paul A. Hartog*

1 The Bauer Thesis: An Overview | 6

—*Rodney J. Decker*

2 Walter Bauer and the Apostolic Fathers | 34

—*Paul A. Hartog*

3 Post-Bauer Scholarship on Gnosticism(s):
The Current State of Our “Knowledge” | 60

—*Carl B. Smith*

4 Baur to Bauer and Beyond: Early Jewish
Christianity and Modern Scholarship | 89

—*William Varner*

5 “Orthodoxy,” “Heresy,” and Complexity:
Montanism as a Case Study | 114

—*Rex D. Butler*

- 6 Apostolic Tradition and the Rule of Faith
in Light of the Bauer Thesis | 141
—*Bryan M. Litfin*
 - 7 Bauer's Forgotten Region: North African Christianity | 166
—*David C. Alexander and Edward L. Smither*
 - 8 Patristic Heresiology: The Difficulties
of Reliability and Legitimacy | 193
—*W. Brian Shelton*
 - 9 Bauer's Early Christian Rome and the
Development of "Orthodoxy" | 213
—*Glen L. Thompson*
 - 10 From Völker to this Volume: A Trajectory
of Critiques and a Final Reflection | 235
—*Paul A. Hartog*
- Bibliography* | 249

Preface

I ESPECIALLY THANK MY parents, John and Martha Hartog, for their support of this project. I wish to acknowledge Allison Brady's help with the bibliography. Amy Kramer's assistance with interlibrary loans was indispensable, as always. I thank all the contributors for their patience in seeing this extended project through to completion. My utmost gratitude is offered to my sweetheart Alne and to our three blessings (Ethan, Anastacia, and Isaiah), for their continual love and support. Abbreviations throughout conform to *The SBL Handbook of Style*, edited by Patrick H. Alexander (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999).

List of Contributors

David C. Alexander (PhD, University of Edinburgh) is Adjunct Professor of Church History at Liberty University, and he is the author of *Augustine's Early Theology of the Church* (2008).

Rex D. Butler (PhD, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary) is Professor of Church History and Patristics at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, and he is the author of *The New Prophecy and "New Visions"* (2006).

Rodney J. Decker (ThD, Central Baptist Theological Seminary) was Professor of Greek and New Testament at Baptist Bible Seminary, and he authored *Temporal Deixis of the Greek Verb in the Gospel of Mark with Reference to Verbal Aspect* (2001); *Koine Greek Reader* (2007); *Reading Koine Greek* (2014); and *Mark: A Handbook on the Greek Text* (2014).

Paul A. Hartog (PhD, Loyola University Chicago) is Professor of New Testament and Early Christian Studies at Faith Baptist Seminary, and he is the author of *Polycarp and the New Testament* (2002) and *Polycarp's Epistle to the Philippians and the Martyrdom of Polycarp* (2013), and the editor of *The Contemporary Church and the Early Church* (Pickwick, 2010).

Bryan M. Litfin (PhD, University of Virginia) is Professor of Theology at Moody Bible Institute, and his works include *Getting to Know the Church Fathers* (2007), *Early Christian Martyr Stories* (2014), and *After Acts: Exploring the Lives and Legends of the Apostles* (2015).

W. Brian Shelton (PhD, Saint Louis University) is Vice President for Academic Affairs and Professor of Theology and Church History at Toccoa Falls College, and his works include *Martyrdom from Exegesis in Hippolytus* (2008).

Carl B. Smith (PhD, Miami University) is a Department Chair and Program Director at South University, and he is the author of *No Longer Jews: The Search for Gnostic Origins* (2004).

Edward L. Smither (PhD, University of Wales—Trinity Saint David; PhD, University of Pretoria) is Professor of Intercultural Studies at Columbia International University, and he is the author of *Augustine as Mentor* (2009), *Brazilian Evangelical Missions in the Arab World* (Pickwick, 2012), *Mission in the Early Church* (Cascade, 2014), the editor of *Rethinking Constantine* (Pickwick, 2014), and the translator of *Early Christianity in North Africa* (Cascade, 2009).

Glen L. Thompson (PhD, Columbia University) is Academic Dean and Professor of Historical Theology and New Testament at Asia Lutheran Seminary (Hong Kong), and he is the author of *The Correspondence of Pope Julius I* (2014).

William Varner (EdD, Temple University) is Professor of Bible and Greek at The Master's College, and he is the author of many books, including *Ancient Jewish-Christian Dialogues* (2005); *The Didache: The First Christian Handbook* (2007); and *The Book of James: A New Perspective* (2011).

Introduction

Paul A. Hartog

WALTER BAUER (1877–1960) WAS an influential German professor, a skilled linguist of classical languages, a biblical commentator, and a historian of early Christianity.¹ He enjoyed a prolonged academic career at the universities of Marburg, Strasburg, and Berlin. Theological students around the world still acknowledge the enduring standard of his lexical work, now known (in the most recent edition) as “BDAG,” the Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*.²

Bauer’s major work that re-oriented the underlying foundations of New Testament scholarship, however, was his 1934 study entitled *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum* (second German edition, 1964).³ This year (2014) marks the golden anniversary (semi-centennial) of the second German edition and the eightieth anniversary of the first German edition. The 1971 Fortress edition of *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* catapulted his influence upon English scholarship. As a testament to its enduring importance, Bauer’s volume is still readily available in print in French as well as in English.⁴

1. See Fascher, “Walter Bauer als Kommentator”; Gingrich, “Walter Bauer”; Schneemelcher, “Walter Bauer als Kirchenhistoriker”; Strecker, “Walter Bauer”; Baird, *History of New Testament Research*, vol. 2, 451–55.

2. See Baird, *History of New Testament Research*, vol. 2, 415–17.

3. Bauer, *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei*; Bauer and Strecker, *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei*.

4. Bauer, *Orthodoxie et hérésie*; Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy*.

Bauer's work questioned basic assumptions of New Testament and early Christian scholarship. He specifically challenged the traditional view of Christian origins, which privileged the primacy of "orthodoxy."⁵ He argued: 1) In many geographical regions, what came to be deemed as "heresy" was the original form of Christianity. 2) In many locales, the "heretical" adherents often outnumbered the "orthodox" adherents. 3) As one form of Christianity among many, "orthodoxy" suppressed "heretical" competitors, often through ecclesiastical machinations and coercive tactics, and especially through the powerful influence of the Roman church. 4) The "orthodox" parties then revised the church's collective memory by claiming that their views had always been the accepted norm. Hans Lietzmann praised the final product as "A splendid book . . . a frontal attack on the usual approach to church history, vigorously carried out with solid erudition, penetrating criticism, and balanced organization."⁶

Although first published eighty years ago, and although criticized in specific details, the *general* thrust of the Bauer Thesis enormously influences early Christian studies even in the present.⁷ Bart Ehrman has called Bauer's study "the most important book on the history of early Christianity to appear in the twentieth century"⁸ and "possibly the most significant book on early Christianity written in modern times."⁹ Bauer's work widened the horizons of New Testament scholarship by bringing the question of "unity and diversity" to the forefront.¹⁰ Prodigées of the

5. As Bart Ehrman explains regarding Bauer's employment of "orthodoxy" and "heresy," "He uses the terms descriptively to refer to social groups, namely, the party that eventually established dominance over the rest of Christendom (orthodoxy) and the individuals and groups that expressed alternative theological views (heresies). In doing so, he implies no value judgment (one group was right, the others were wrong) and does not embrace the traditional notion that one of the groups (orthodoxy) could claim historical priority and numerical superiority over the others" (Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption*, 8). Thus "heretical" simply refers to "forms subsequently condemned by the victorious party" (ibid.). Ehrman agrees that "the labels *can* retain their usefulness as descriptions of social and political realities, quite apart from their theological connotations" (ibid., 13).

6. As found in Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy*, 287.

7. Besides the famous names that follow in the paragraph above, see also Dart, *Jesus of Heresy and History*; Riley, *One Jesus, Many Christs*.

8. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, 173.

9. Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption*, 7.

10. See Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament*; Carson, "Unity and Diversity in the New Testament"; Smalley, "Diversity and Development in John"; Martin, "Some Reflections"; Köstenberger, "Diversity and Unity."

Bauer Thesis (in revised forms) include such famous and accomplished scholars as Karen King (Harvard University), Helmut Koester (Harvard University), Gerd Lüdemann (University of Göttingen), Elaine Pagels (Princeton University), James Robinson (Claremont Graduate University), and the late Marvin Meyer (Chapman University).¹¹ Perhaps the most celebrated contemporary disseminator of Bauer's basic approach is Bart Ehrman, a prolific author who has written or edited around thirty volumes, including four books on the *New York Times* bestseller list.¹²

These scholars, following in the footsteps of Bauer, emphasize the diversity of "early Christianities,"¹³ sometimes denying any theological strand or core that could claim normative continuity with apostolic tradition. As a result, substantially diverse movements become more or less equally valid forms of Christianity, and ancient "heresies" can be recovered as rehabilitated "lost Christianities."¹⁴ The Bauer Thesis has become "the now-familiar story of the tremendous diversity of early Christianity and its eventual suppression by a powerful 'proto-orthodox' faction."¹⁵ As Ehrman explains, the group eventually tagged as "orthodox," which possessed "a kind of spirited intolerance of contrary views," achieved social dominance through such power ploys as "social ostracism, economic pressures, and political machinations."¹⁶ "Only when one social group had exerted itself sufficiently over the rest of Christendom did a 'majority' opinion emerge; only then did the 'right belief' represent the view

11. For the intervening period between Bauer and these contemporaries, Köstenberger and Kruger highlight the work of Rudolf Bultmann (Köstenberger and Kruger, *Heresy of Orthodoxy*, 27–28).

12. Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*; Ehrman, *God's Problem*; Ehrman, *Jesus Interrupted*; and Ehrman, *Forged*. One would imagine that Ehrman's recently published *How Jesus Became God* will enjoy similar popularity.

13. "Evidence for this view has been steadily mounting throughout the present century: we know of the widespread diversity of early Christianity from both primary and secondary accounts, and can sometimes pinpoint this diversity with considerable accuracy" (Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption*, 4).

14. See Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*.

15. See Koester, "Gnomai Diaphoroi." Cf. Henry, "Why is Contemporary Scholarship So Enamored of Ancient Heresies?"

16. Ehrman, *Orthodox Corruption*, 13, 17. "Looked at in sociohistorical terms, orthodoxy and heresy are concerned as much with struggles over power as with debates over ideas" (*ibid.*, 14).

of the Christian church at large.”¹⁷ But this was due to “the ‘accident’ of their preservation.”¹⁸

The last eighty years have proven that the Bauer Thesis was a bold, provocative understanding of Christian origins. On the one hand, even Bauer’s critics acknowledge his fascinating suggestions and erudite contentions, as well as his dismantling of simplistic, ahistorical views of “monolithic dogma.” By examining data from specific geographical locations with careful attention to localized details, he rightfully persuaded other scholars to mistrust sweeping generalizations.¹⁹ He motivated theologians to consider the role of sociological and political forces within theological debates. Furthermore, he helped to renew interest in forgotten movements that had been swept away by history. On the other hand, Bauer overlooked, ignored, or manipulated historical data, and he often resorted to unfounded conjectures, special pleading, or arguments from silence.

On any view, the Bauer Thesis has greatly influenced New Testament studies, although his original work purposely targeted only second- and third-century Christianity. In this sense, the word *earliest* in the title of his work (*Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*) can be a misleading descriptor.²⁰ Ironically, Bauer dismissed the New Testament as “both too unproductive and too much disputed to be able to serve as a point of departure.”²¹ Most critical assessments of Bauer’s work, however, have come from the pens of New Testament scholars, even to this day (most recently, Andreas Köstenberger and Michael Kruger, *The Heresy of Orthodoxy*, 2010).

The reconstruction of equally valid forms of Christianity without a normative center continues to be a “live” topic. The present volume forms a unique contribution through its comprehensive analysis, including critical evaluations by a range of New Testament and especially Patristic scholars. The Patristic focus reflects the second- and third-century emphasis of Bauer himself. Moreover, the interdisciplinary approach guarantees that the compilation will be a valuable resource in both the New Testament and Patristic fields. The essayists have re-examined the Bauer Thesis by taking a fresh look at orthodoxy and heresy, unity and

17. *Ibid.*, 8.

18. *Ibid.*

19. See Gero, “With Walter Bauer on the Tigris.”

20. Marshall, “Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earlier Christianity”; Staten, “Was There Unity in the Sub-Apostolic Church?”

21. Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy*, xxv.

diversity, theology and ideology, and rhetoric and polemic within early Christian contexts. They have updated the discussion through investigations of post-Bauer evidence concerning Gnosticism and Jewish Christianity, and they have examined a region of early Christianity completely overlooked by Bauer—the North African churches. All contributors have authored previous publications in their respective topics.

These focused essays, supplemented by post-Bauer discoveries and refined by post-Bauer scholarship, reveal new insights through careful attention to historical detail and geographical particularity, even as Bauer himself demanded.²² Although recognizing the importance of Bauer's innovative methodologies, fruitful suggestions, and legitimate criticisms of traditional views, the contributors also expose Bauer's numerous claims that fall short of the historical evidence. The contributors' desire is that this fresh examination of Bauer's paradigm may serve as a launching point to a richer and deeper understanding of the unity and diversity (and even normativity) found in the variegated early Christian movement.

22. The majority of these essays were presented at an invited session of the Patristics and Medieval History Section of the Evangelical Theological Society. As chairperson of the section, I was tasked with editing this volume. As always, the particular views expressed remain those of each individual contributor alone.

1

The Bauer Thesis: An Overview

Rodney J. Decker

CONTROVERSIES REGARDING JESUS AND the early Jesus movement are certainly not new, dating back now several centuries.¹ Philip Jenkins summarizes an often-forgotten history of the proposals which have been “a perennial phenomenon within Western culture since the Enlightenment.”² The primary impetus for the recent outbreak of speculation has not been the discovery of new data very different from what we have known for a long time. Rather it is, claims Jenkins, a philosophical/ideological shift in Western culture: the rise of postmodernism and its entailments.³

One of the current writers in the media spotlight is Bart Ehrman. He is not the first nor only voice advocating a radical overhaul of our conception of early Christianity.⁴ He has been, however, one of the more

1. For an overview of the various “Jesus Quests,” see Bock, *Studying the Historical Jesus*; Boyd, *Cynic Sage or Son of God?*; Johnson, *Real Jesus*; Schweitzer, *Von Reimarus zu Wrede*; later titled *Geschichte der Leben-Jesu-Forschung*, 2nd German ed., ET, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, 2nd English ed.; Wilkins and Moreland, *Jesus Under Fire*; Witherington *Jesus Quest*, 2nd ed.; and Witherington, *What Have They Done with Jesus?*; and, on a broader scale, Baird, *History of New Testament Research*, 3 vols.

2. Jenkins, *Hidden Gospels*, 15; see his summary on pp. 13–15.

3. *Ibid.*, 15–20, 124–47, 169–77. I have not attempted to track all the reasons for the contemporary speculation, being content with noting only the most significant issues.

4. For similar literature, see Riley, *One Jesus, Many Christs*; Lüdemann, *Heretics*; Hopkins, *World Full of Gods*; Pagels, *Gnostic Gospels*; Dart, *Jesus of Heresy and History*;

visible and influential voices.⁵ This is due to several factors. First, he is a first-rate scholar in a significant discipline, New Testament textual criticism. In this regard he has justifiably benefited from his association with the “dean” of that field, Bruce Metzger.⁶ He is also a good writer and effective communicator. In addition, he has achieved broad media exposure for his popularization of more scholarly work.⁷ His major publications relevant to the history of early Christianity include the following:

- *Orthodox Corruption of Scripture: The Effect of Early Christological Controversies on the Text of the New Testament* (1993)
- *Lost Christianities: The Battle for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew* (2003)
- *Lost Scriptures: Books That Did Not Make It into the New Testament* (2003)
- *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (2005)
- *Jesus Interrupted: Revealing the Hidden Contradictions in the Bible (and Why We Don't Know about Them)* (2009)
- *Forged: Writing in the Name of God, Why the Bible's Authors Are Not Who We Think They Are* (2011)
- *How Jesus Became God: The Exaltation of a Jewish Preacher from Galilee* (2014)

The thesis which Ehrman proposes runs as follows, in his own words. After listing a wide range of phenomena in the diverse groups comprising “Christendom”⁸—including everything from Roman Catholic mis-

Funk, *Honest to Jesus*; and Ruether, *Women and Redemption*.

5. The real issues are not in Ehrman, though he builds on them; he is only the most recent popularizer of much older ideas. Perhaps this record of my explorations (and excavations!) in the piles that have accumulated in my study of late will be of help in orienting others to the issues which Ehrman’s writings have raised.

6. Ehrman was one of Metzger’s last two PhD students in textual criticism at Princeton (the other being Michael Holmes) and he was selected to prepare the most recent revision of Metzger’s standard textbook, *Text of the New Testament*, 4th ed.

7. Ehrman has been featured on National Public Radio, has served as a consultant for major media specials on related topics (e.g., the Gospel of Judas), and has achieved significant rankings on bestseller lists.

8. The use of “Christendom” is my term, intended to be understood as a very broad cover term for any and all groups that profess any form of allegiance to Jesus and/or

sionaries, snake handlers, Greek Orthodoxy, fundamentalists, mainline churches, to David Koresh—Ehrman writes,

All this diversity of belief and practice, and the intolerance that occasionally results, makes it difficult to know whether we should think of Christianity as one thing or lots of things, whether we should speak of Christianity or Christianities.

What could be more diverse than this variegated phenomenon, Christianity in the modern world? In fact, there may be an answer: Christianity in the ancient world. . . .

Most of these ancient forms of Christianity are unknown to people in the world today, since they eventually came to be reformed or stamped out. As a result, the sacred texts that some ancient Christians used to support their religious perspectives came to be proscribed, destroyed, or forgotten—in one way or another lost. . . .

Virtually all forms of modern Christianity . . . go back to *one* form of Christianity that emerged as victorious from the conflicts of the second and third centuries. This one form of Christianity decided what was the “correct” Christian perspective; it decided who could exercise authority over Christian belief and practice; and it determined what forms of Christianity would be marginalized, set aside, destroyed. It also decided which books to canonize into Scripture and which books to set aside as “heretical,” teaching false ideas.

And then, as a coup de grâce, this victorious party rewrote the history of the controversy, making it appear that there had not been much of a conflict at all, claiming that its own views had always been those of the majority of Christians at all times, back to the time of Jesus and his apostles, that its perspective, in effect, had always been “orthodox” (i.e., the “right belief”) and that its opponents in the conflict, with their other scriptural texts, had always represented small splinter groups invested in deceiving people into “heresy.”

It is striking that, for centuries, virtually everyone who studied the history of early Christianity simply accepted the version of the early conflicts written by the orthodox victors. This all began to change in a significant way in the nineteenth century as some scholars began to question the “objectivity” of such early Christian writers as the fourth-century orthodox writer Eusebius, the so-called Father of Church History, who reproduced

the term *Christian*. Ehrman calls it simply “Christianity”—without delineation as to how that ought to be defined.

for us the earliest account of the conflict. This initial query into Eusebius's accuracy eventually became, in some circles, a virtual onslaught on his character, as twentieth-century scholars began to subject his work to an ideological critique that exposed his biases and their role in his presentation. This reevaluation of Eusebius was prompted, in part, by the discovery of additional ancient books . . . other Gospels, for example, that also claimed to be written in the names of apostles.⁹

Ehrman is quite right that this is not the traditional portrait of early Christianity. But it is by no means original with him, though he has done as much to popularize it as anyone in recent years. The real credit for this view of history belongs to Walter Bauer, so we will fittingly commence with the fountain and by first examining Bauer's influential thesis.¹⁰

Bauer's *Orthodoxy and Heresy* (1934)

Brilliant, profound, extremely well read, indefatigable—these are all accurate descriptions of the German scholar to whom we owe much.¹¹ Although taking sharp issue with Bauer's thesis under consideration, I have a great respect for his lexical work.¹² No serious work in New Testament

9. Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, 1, 4, 5.

10. It is possible that the core of Bauer's ideas are much older; Harold O. J. Brown refers to Johann Semler's contention that "the present canon is arbitrary and represents the victory of the Roman see in the ecclesiastical politics of the early church" (Brown, *Heresies*, 71; citing Semler, *Abhandlung von freier Untersuchung des Canons*, but no page reference is given; I have not had access to Semler's work to see if the idea is developed further).

There are definitely other contributing factors, most of which are closer at hand than Semler's eighteenth-century work. Michel Desjardins comments that Bauer's "study was a natural extension of a preceding century's scholarly work," listing the Tübingen school (F. C. Baur), the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule*, and Harnack's work on heresy and the gnostics as direct contributors to the thesis of Bauer's *Orthodoxy and Heresy* (Desjardins, "Bauer and Beyond," 67–68). See also Robinson, *Bauer Thesis Examined*, 15–18, who qualifies the nature of the relationship between Tübingen/F. C. Baur and Walter Bauer's argument.

11. In this section references to the English translation of Bauer's *Orthodoxy and Heresy* are given parenthetically (as is also the case in other summaries that follow). The sketch given here cannot be complete due to limitations of space, but the main lines of Bauer's argument are traced, though without much of his supporting evidence. I have tried to make the summary just that and refrain from critique at this point. When unavoidable, I have added my comments in a footnote.

12. My extensive tributes (and corrections) to BDAG may be found at www.

exegesis is possible without reference to his lexicon, whether the third English edition¹³ or the sixth German edition.¹⁴ But before the professor from Göttingen turned his attention to lexicography¹⁵ Walter Bauer (1877–1960) published several works on the history of the early church, including a 1903 study of the Syrian canon of the epistles in the fourth and fifth centuries¹⁶ and another in 1909 of Jesus in the apocrypha.¹⁷ Bauer published a major work in 1934 which has had major influence in its field over the last eighty years: *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum*¹⁸—a “paradigm-shaping book.”¹⁹ Although widely discussed on the Continent and in England,²⁰ it was not until the release of an English translation almost forty years later that its impact was noticeably felt in America.²¹ Since that time it has influenced almost every discussion of the topic.²² *Orthodoxy and Heresy* is not a full statement of Bauer’s ideas

ntresources.com/blog/?s=bdag. It should be noted that Danker’s contributions to the English edition are at least equally valuable with Bauer’s original work.

13. Edited by Frederick Danker. The first English translation, known as “BAG,” appeared in 1957, based on the 4th German edition. The second English edition of 1979 (“BAGD”) was based on the fifth edition of the German work.

14. Aland, Aland, and Reichmann, *Griechisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch*, 6th ed. The third English edition is known as BDAG (Bauer and Danker, *Greek-English Lexicon*). See Decker, “Using BDAG.”

15. Bauer was the editor for the 1928, second edition of Preuschen’s lexicon with the third edition of 1937 bearing Bauer’s name alone. The fourth edition in 1949–1952 was the most significant revision, followed by a fifth edition, the last edited by Bauer, in 1957–1958; a sixth edition of the German work appeared in 1988. For a more detailed history of BDAG, see Decker, “Using BDAG.” Jerry Flora’s dissertation provides a broad review of Bauer’s life and scholarly career (Flora, “Critical Analysis of Walter Bauer’s Theory,” 23–35).

16. Bauer, *Der Apostolos der Syrer*.

17. Bauer, *Das Leben Jesu*.

18. Bauer, *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum*. The text of the two editions is essentially the same with only typographical corrections; the major difference is the addition of two essays by Strecker in the second edition.

19. Bingham, “Development and Diversity,” 50.

20. See Strecker, “Reception of the Book,” 286–316 for a listing of reviews and an extensive discussion of reactions to Bauer’s German work.

21. Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy*.

22. A surprising exception is the 500-page work on heresy by H. O. Brown (*Heresies*). I can find no citation of Bauer in the footnotes and he is not listed in the index. Although one chapter bibliography lists the title (chap. 2, p. 22), there is no interaction with Bauer in the chapter.

regarding the origins of “orthodoxy” and “heresy,” but this limited essay does not allow a broader discussion of Bauer’s other writings.²³

Bauer’s *Orthodoxy and Heresy* argues that we cannot merely assume that orthodoxy came first and that heresy is a later deviation, for in doing so we “simply agree with the judgment of the anti-heretical fathers for the post-New Testament period” (xxi). This is neither scientific nor fair since we are listening to only one voice—that of the winners; we do not allow the losers to speak for themselves. “Perhaps . . . certain manifestations of Christian life that the authors of the church renounce as ‘heresies’ originally had not been such at all, but, at least here and there, were the only form of the new religion—that is, for those regions they were simply ‘Christianity.’ The possibility also exists that their adherents constituted the majority” (xxii).

This is the hypothesis that Bauer proposes to test, though Bauer’s professed neutral critical method too frequently slips into the role of defense lawyer or apologist for the heretics rather than impartial judge of the evidence.²⁴ The evidence he examines in subsequent chapters is considered geographically, area by area, to determine the evidence for what form/s of Christianity are attested in the earliest discernible period. Bauer begins with Edessa and follows with Egypt, Antioch, Asia Minor, and Rome.

Syrian Edessa, located on a tributary of the Euphrates just north of the present north-central border of Turkey and Syria, is the focus of Bauer’s first chapter. After discrediting all traditional accounts of the origins of Christianity in Edessa, Bauer argues that the original form of Christianity there was Marcionite (and that not until mid-second century, followed by Bardesanes and his followers shortly afterwards). It was not until the end of the second century that there is any trace of what came later to be known as “orthodoxy,” which remained a small minority through the fourth century. Only in the fifth century is orthodoxy finally imposed on Edessa by the “rather coarse methods” of Bishop Rabbula, the “tyrant of Edessa” (27). The “beginnings for the history of Christianity in Edessa” rest on “an unmistakably heretical basis” (43).

23. For a survey of the relevant material from Bauer’s previous books and articles, see Betz, “Orthodoxy and Heresy in Primitive Christianity,” 299–311.

24. I have read similar statements several times and do not know who originated the analogy. For two representative instances, see Moffat, “Review,” 475 (“he tends to take the position of the barrister rather than of the judge”); and Desjardins, “Bauer and Beyond,” 68n9 (“his professed impartiality shifts at times to an apologist on behalf of the ‘heretics’”).

Egypt next receives attention. Bauer declines to be discouraged by the silence of the sources regarding the early history of Christianity in Egypt since Edessan history establishes the pattern. Why would the churchmen have been “silent about the origins of Christianity in such an important center as Alexandria if there had been something favorable to report?” (45). The answer, though conjectural, is clear: Egyptian Christianity was, like Edessa, heretical in origin. The earliest form of the faith was gnostic no later than the beginning of the second century. Not until the end of that century does “orthodoxy” appear and “even into the third century, no separation between orthodoxy and heresy was accomplished” (59).

Bauer then turns to Antioch, which, though seeming to the reader of the New Testament to be a bastion of normative Christianity,²⁵ had long been heavily influenced by heretical movements. Since the time of Paul’s defeat there (Gal 2), Antioch “played no significant role in the history of the church” (63)—that is the proto-orthodox church. Instead there was a syncretistic mixture of “Jewish Christianity,” Gentile Christianity [i.e., what was left of Paul’s influence], and Gnosticism. Not until the “frantic concern” (63) of Ignatius in the early second century is there a renewed attempt to reestablish “orthodoxy.” Ignatius, however, is not a reliable source since his exuberance causes him to lose “all sense of proportion . . . [so] one must be especially careful in evaluating the accuracy of his statements” (61). His attempt to impose a powerful monarchical bishop structure on the church is a political move by someone in a minority position attempting to gain power and control (62).

Asia Minor also shows unmistakable gnostic influence, and that *within* the churches, as reflected in the Johannine literature.²⁶ Ignatius’s letters to churches in Asia Minor are also relevant in this regard, since they reflect the limit of his influence. He can expect to be heard in only a few churches, and even then he is attempting to “stretch the circle of his influence as widely as possible” (79). It is significant that four of the churches in the region which had earlier been addressed in the Apocalypse are not included in Ignatius’s list. Since these are the churches most

25. Bauer declines to consider New Testament evidence since it “seems to be both too unproductive and too much disputed to be able to serve as a point of departure” (Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy*, xxv).

26. John the “apocalyptic seer” is not very useful for the current question according to Bauer since his “extremely confused religious outlook that peculiarly mixes Jewish, Christian, and mythological elements and ends up in chiliasm . . . [a] stormy outburst, seething with hate” marks him, not as an intellectual or spiritual leader of influence, but only as a proponent of “wishful thinking” (Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy*, 77–78).

severely rebuked by John, it is evident that they moved into full-blown heresy by the time of Ignatius (78–79). That Hierapolis and Colossae are “bypassed in icy silence by both John and Ignatius” (80) further reflects the lack of influence of orthodoxy in this area. Peter likewise is very selective in his address to the churches of Asia Minor (1 Pet 1:1), leaving large “blank spots on the map” of Asian orthodoxy: “there simply was nothing to be gained for ‘ecclesiastically’ oriented Christianity in that area at that time” (82). Even Ephesus, often perceived as the bastion of Pauline orthodoxy, has been lost to that cause by the end of the first century, perhaps to the extent that Paul’s foundational labors there had been forgotten. Paul “lost the contest in Ephesus” (85), something that was becoming evident even during his lifetime. “Orthodoxy” was only reorganized much later when the apostle John became their patron, likely due to the arrival of Jewish Christians (including John and Philip) from Jerusalem following the war with Rome. Yet even this did not result in an “orthodox” victory since the Pastorals still reflect a major problem with Gnosticism in the second century (89).

Next Bauer considers the Roman church and its tactics in establishing their particular brand of Christianity as the dominant form worldwide. The initial foray in this direction is Bauer’s study of *1 Clement*, the letter from the church of Rome to the Corinthian church written near the end of the first century. We cannot trust the direct statements of this biased letter, says Bauer, but must read between the lines to reconstruct the actual situation which prompted the letter and decipher the real motivation for Rome’s letter. “Rome takes action not when it is overflowing with love or when the great concerns of the faith are really in jeopardy, but when there is at least the opportunity of enlarging its own sphere of influence” (97–98).

The first evidence we have of this Roman strategy is in relation to the church at Corinth, reflected in the letter of *1 Clement*. In that situation “internal discord greatly reduced the power of resistance of the Corinthian church, so that it seemed to be easy prey” (98). The specifics there involve the usurpation of the existing church leaders by younger ones; Rome writes in an effort to reinstate the older leaders who were more favorable to the Roman position. The conflict goes all the way back to Paul. Those rebuked by him as “the strong” were gnostics who, though silenced at the time, had gradually increased in number (their position was more attractive to the community than Paul’s approach), though they chafed under the repressive leadership of the church. By the

time of *1 Clement* they had become strong enough to oust the leaders (which by this time were a coalition of the Paul and Cephas parties) and to take over the church (100–101), perhaps even imposing an “energetic bishop” on the previously plural presbyterate (112). “Rome succeeded in imposing its will on Corinth” to the extent that a half century later the Corinthian church still accepted Roman authority and read *1 Clement* in their services (104). And so began the Roman movement to consolidate her authority one church at a time, culminating in the exclusive establishment of Rome’s brand of Christianity, now branded as “orthodoxy,” in the fourth century.

The Roman juggernaut evidenced itself in later claims of apostolic succession used in the fight against heresy, not only in Rome but elsewhere under Roman influence. Rome also extended her influence through teaching Christians in other places and also through generous financial gifts—and “such gifts were not the least reason why their opponents emerged victorious” (122, seeming to imply that Rome’s opponents were “bought”). Bauer cites Eusebius’s (much later) comment as reflective of a practice that had been operative earlier as well:

The encomium of Eusebius upon the Emperor Constantine (3.58) teaches us that Rome viewed it as an altogether legitimate practice in religious controversy to tip the scales with golden weights: “In his beneficent concern that as many as possible be won for the teaching of the gospel, the emperor also made rich donations there [in Phoenician Heliopolis] for the support of the poor, with the aim of rousing them even in this way to the acceptance of saving truth (123).²⁷

The following two chapters trace the rhetoric in the orthodoxy-heresy debate, as well as the use of literature. Both parties used written documents, and each used whatever means possible to discredit their opponents, to the extent of falsifying and/or destroying documents (160) and even modifying their own source documents to more clearly make their case (160, supported with several pages of illustration from the *Odyssey!*). The various polemical writings employed cannot be trusted to represent accurately the opponents’ position, and since the “orthodox” came to hold the privileged position, we have little from the heretics’ own pens even though they were the more prolific writers (194). The most extensive “orthodox” writer, Eusebius, is not to be trusted; his “serious

27. Bracketed material is original in Bauer.

misuse of the superlative” (and other problems), says Bauer, “is sufficient to remove any inclination I might have to take such assertions seriously” (192). Other than his citations from other writers, little is useful; “we cannot establish any firm foothold on the basis of what Eusebius himself contributes” (192).

Traditional literature is treated next: the use of the Old Testament as well as divergent gospels. “At that point there probably was no version of Christianity worthy of note that did not have at its disposal at least *one* written gospel, in which Jesus appears as the bearer and guarantor of that particular view” (203). Though the other gospels were accepted fairly early (especially Mark and Matthew), John’s gospel was viewed with suspicion in orthodox Rome almost from the start (208). It was rather the preferred gospel of the gnostics and other heretics. “When the gospel canon was defined, which was to be valid for the entire church, Rome found itself overruled, to put it rather crudely” (212).²⁸

When we come to the epistles, Paul is nearly irrelevant to early Roman orthodoxy, being the darling of many of the heretics (215–25). Bauer’s summary is worth citing.

Perhaps, as the situation developed, some would have preferred henceforth to exclude Paul completely. . . . But it was already too late for that. Rome (together with the “church,” which it led) had already accepted too much from the Apostle to the Gentiles, had appealed to him too often, suddenly to recognize him no longer. . . . 1 Corinthians had proved itself to be extremely productive for purposes of church politics in the hands of Rome. . . .

. . . I am inclined to see the pastoral Epistles as an attempt on the part of the church unambiguously to enlist Paul as part of its anti-heretical front and to eliminate the lack of confidence in him in ecclesiastical circles. . . . The church raised up the Paul of orthodoxy by using [pseudonymous] means. . . .

The price the Apostle of the Gentiles had to pay to be allowed to remain in the church was the complete surrender of his personality and historical particularity. . . . Whenever the “church” becomes powerful, the bottom drops out from under him and he must immediately give way to the celebrities from the circle of the twelve apostles. . . . To some extent Paul becomes influential only as part of the holy scriptures acknowledged in the church—not the personality of the Apostle to the Gentiles

28. This is a rather ironic statement in Bauer regarding the church which otherwise exercised such authoritarian power!

and his proclamation, but the *word* of Paul . . . whenever it is useful for the development and preservation of ecclesiastical teaching. . . . The introduction of the pastoral Epistles actually made the collection of Paul's letters ecclesiastically viable for the very first time (225–28 *passim*).

Paul seems to fare quite poorly in the hands of Bauer's early "orthodoxy." This is largely because of what Bauer perceives to be Paul's "as yet quite rudimentary organization of thought patterns" (234), but even more because of his plasticity and tolerance. Not only could he be used by so many diverse groups, he "scarcely knows what a heretic might be" (234). He knows that a lot of other Christians disagree with him—and that is fine with him. It is only the "most serious moral deviation" (235) that gets him upset. Even when he felt opposing positions to be "defective, he still did not detest and condemn them as heretical" (237).²⁹

What we have known since the fourth century as "orthodoxy" was originally the dominant form of Christianity only in Rome. Through generous financial "gifts" and persuasive correspondence, "Rome confidently extends itself eastward, tries to break down resistance and stretches out a helping hand to those who are like-minded, drawing everything within reach into the well-knit structures of ecclesiastical organization" (231). Rome is thus the winner who vanquishes heresy by superior ability, backed by financial and political resources.

Bauer concludes by reflecting that "it is indeed a curious quirk of history that western Rome was destined to begin to exert the determinative influence upon a religion which had its cradle in the Orient, so as to give it that form in which it was to achieve worldwide recognition" (240). None of the heretical forms of Christianity, be they gnostic, Marcionite, or Montanist, "could have achieved such recognition" (240).

The essence, then, of Bauer's thesis is two-fold: in the beginning there were many varieties of Christianity (i.e., not a single, unified set of beliefs that later became what we know as "orthodoxy"), and second, it

29. In regard to passages that seem to contradict this portrait of Paul, Bauer adds a footnote: "The thrust of the polemic in Phil. 3 and in Rom. 16.17–20 is not entirely clear—or in any event, can be interpreted in different ways—and may be left aside at this point" (Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy*, 236n11). In other words, he ignored what was not convenient for his theory! For a careful consideration of Paul's influence vis-à-vis Bauer, though in this case in the context of Philippi, see Hartog, *Polycarp and the New Testament*, 216–22. For Paul's influence on Polycarp, see Berding, *Polycarp and Paul*.

was the victory of one party, the church of Rome, which established the official dogma, suppressing all other competing views.³⁰

Responses to Bauer

In an essay of this restricted length it is obviously impossible to respond fully to a substantial book like Bauer's. Rather I will summarize some of the key responses that have been posed in some detail by others, both as a direction for further reading and as a focused summary of the critical verdicts that have accumulated since *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum* was first published in 1934.³¹ In one sense, this survey of literature may seem rather tendentious or superfluous. It is justified, however, by the fact that contemporary scholars such as Ehrman seem to *assume* the validity of Bauer's general thesis.³² For our purposes, the most significant critiques of Bauer, in historical order, include the following.³³

30. See the similar summary in Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, 176 (172–75 in greater detail); McCue, "Orthodoxy and Heresy," 119–20; and Bock, *Missing Gospels*, 49–50.

31. I give, for the most part, only the conclusions and do not attempt to detail all the supporting evidence in these critiques. Also note that I have included only reviews that are critical of some aspect of Bauer's thesis. Since I am persuaded that most of Bauer's work is misguided, and that the studies discussed here demonstrate that quite clearly, it is not necessary to list the areas in which I agree with his analysis or note other scholars who do the same. For an extended discussion of (largely positive) responses, see Georg Strecker's appendix in the English translation of Bauer (Strecker, "Reception of the Book"). These are, of course, only the earlier responses to the German edition. Most reviews have included positive elements of appreciation (see Köstenberger and Kruger, *Heresy of Orthodoxy*, 33).

32. See Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, 172–75.

33. For broad-ranging surveys of reviews published since 1934, see the articles by Harrington, "Reception," 289–98; Flora, "Critical Analysis," 37–88; and Desjardins, "Bauer and Beyond," 65–82. For a review of earlier responses to the German edition, see Strecker, "Reception of the Book." Another work that is sometimes listed as a critique of Bauer is Hultgren's *Rise of Normative Christianity*, but though disagreeing with Bauer, it is not a particularly focused critique—and a number of Hultgren's proposals, building on Robinson and Koester, *Trajectories through Early Christianity*, are themselves problematic. For a brief summary of Hultgren's approach, see Köstenberger and Kruger, *Heresy of Orthodoxy*, 37.

Turner, *The Pattern of Christian Truth* (1954)

The first major critique of Bauer was H. E. W. Turner's *The Pattern of Christian Truth*³⁴—the Bampton Lectures for 1954. The 500+ pages of this study offer Turner's "equivalent" of Bauer's work, but chapter two is an explicit critique of Bauer. His analysis follows Bauer's geographical outline. In regards to Edessa he concludes that "the evidence is too scanty and in many respects too flimsy to support any theory so trenchant and clear-cut as Bauer proposes" and "his skepticism on many points of detail appears excessive" (45). Turning to Egypt he proposes that there is more literary evidence than Bauer has acknowledged (some of it unknown in Bauer's day, but not all). "Most of the new discoveries have the effect of moving what we know of Alexandrine Christianity further to the right" (i.e., toward a more "orthodox" view). The greater probability is that the evidence Bauer examined is to be understood as representative of "splinter groups on the fringe of the Church" (57). All told, there is less evidence for Bauer's thesis from Alexandria than from Edessa (59). Likewise in Asia Minor there is nothing which "supports the more daring features of Bauer's reconstruction" (63). The picture Bauer draws of Corinth, Rome, and *1 Clement* "is at best non-proven" (67). As will others who follow, Turner charges Bauer with a "misuse of the argument from silence. If we have no evidence for the fact, we can hardly offer any profitable conjecture about its alleged cause" (67). Turner's final verdict is that Bauer's "fatal weakness appears to be a persistent tendency to over-simplify problems, combined with the ruthless treatment of such evidence as fails to support his case" (79).

Betz, "Orthodoxy and Heresy in Primitive Christianity" (1965)

Although basically in agreement with Bauer's approach, Hans Dieter Betz pointed out two significant problems. First, on Egypt, Bauer got it wrong: there was a strong gnostic presence, but that is not the only form of Christianity seen there. Second, he ignored the New Testament evidence; in particular, he "clearly underestimates Paul's fight against his opponents. Bauer overlooks the fact that Paul claims to be 'orthodox.' Wherever Paul

34. Turner, *Pattern of Christian Truth*.

argues in his letters, he does it to prove that his theological understanding is in accordance with the kerygma itself.”³⁵

Chapman, “Some Theological Reflections on Walter Bauer’s *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum*: A Review Article” (1970)

G. Clarke Chapman’s review article was published prior to the release of the English translation of Bauer.³⁶ Chapman targets two major tactics: Bauer’s numerous arguments from silence (“habitually sees many gaps in our records as significant or ominous”), and his “habitually coercing ambiguous pieces of evidence” to fit a preconceived theory (567). According to Chapman, Bauer is also overly skeptical of Eusebius and other Fathers who defend the traditional view, yet “gives immediate and weighty credence to the slightest reference by the church fathers to widespread or predominating heresy” (567).³⁷ Chapman also rejects Bauer’s portrait of “power politics and sociological pressures” emanating from Rome, suggesting instead that we ought to consider the possibility that the victory of orthodoxy is related to providence: “certain broad lines of interpretation may have triumphed because of their theological adequacy” (572), though he realizes that “historians” have trouble dealing with such theological categories.

Flora, “A Critical Analysis of Walter Bauer’s Theory of Early Christian Orthodoxy and Heresy” (1972)

One of the first full-length critics of Bauer from an American writer was the dissertation presented at The Southern Baptist Seminary in 1972 by Jerry Flora.³⁸ Flora leveled some stiff criticism against Bauer’s thesis, which he viewed as a one-sided over-reaction to the traditional, Eusebian view of heresy. As a result, Flora argued that Bauer’s conclusions need to be substantially modified (though not rejected out of hand).

35. Betz, “Orthodoxy and Heresy,” 306–8 (direct quote from 308).

36. Chapman, “Some Theological Reflections,” 564–74.

37. Chapman later used the phrase “Eusebius demythologized” (*ibid.*, 569).

38. Flora, “Critical Analysis of Walter Bauer’s Theory.”