

How adequate would it be to take "heresy" to apply to any formulation of faith that allows the situation—past or present—in whose terms it must always be cast to become, in some way, lord of the witness of faith?

This is a question I've asked myself since reading what Marxsen has to say about the meaning of the term. Anything deriving from the situation in whose terms witness is formulated that is or becomes a "barrier" to faith thereafter is heretical—this is one way in which he speaks of "heresy." Another way is to say that the line is crossed into heresy whenever something is placed, or allowed to stand, alongside the unique object of faith as somehow essential to Christian faith and witness—whether it be the law (as in the case of the Judaizers in Galatia) or a spiritual Christ (as in the case of the Gnostics in Corinth), or the Bible, or the New Testament, or the kerygma—all of which have also functioned as "barriers" to faith and as violating the *solus Deus*, the *solus Christus*, etc.

Anyhow, I have thought for some time that modernist accommodation (to the contemporary situation) and fundamentalist preservation (of some past situation) are alike ways—"mirror images" of one another, as Sumner suggests—of falling into distorted understandings of Christian witness for which "heresy" may be the right word. I say "*may* be," however, because I also recall John Knox's insistence that all proper "heresies" deny, or imply the denial of, not simply the church's opinions, but its essence, or constitution. So "inadequacy" (or "inappropriateness") may very well be one thing, "heresy," something else, although, on the other hand, any teaching that asserts or implies the denial of the *particula exclusiva* in any of its several necessary applications would certainly appear to set up something alongside the essential or substantial foundation of faith itself.

In any case, I would not want to say, as Marxsen does, that, because "the decision whether or not one is a Christian is made in one's life, not in one's head," a heretic is "someone who does not live out of Jesus' offer" (*AJN*: 157). As much as I agree with his premise, I can only disagree with his inference from it, because "heresy," as I understand it, properly applies to *teaching* and, therefore, is very much a matter of one's head, even if authentic faith is just as certainly a matter of

one's "heart" and "life." In somewhat the same way, I have long hesitated simply to agree with Reinhold Niebuhr that a teaching's lack of conformity to the facts of experience is a mark of heresy—although I've also wondered sometimes whether my hesitation is really consistent with what I myself think and say about the claim of Christian witness to be credible in terms of common human experience and reason—namely, that it is a claim made or implied in bearing Christian witness itself.

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