

1.2 DEFINITION OF TERMS

1.2.1 Systematic Theology, Orthodoxy and Heresy

Systematic theology is first and foremost theology, which can basically be defined as “the study or science of God” (Erickson 1998:22). Specifically, systematic theology can be further defined as “a coherent and comprehensive explication of the teachings of the canonical Scriptures (the Bible) in relation to modern questions and modern knowledge” (Hart 1999:6). Taking it one step further, a Christian systematic theology would be “centered on Christ,” since “He is the center of everything: history, the Bible, our faith” (Hart 1999:7). And, the ultimate purpose of theology of any kind is to help humanity “to really *know* God . . . not just know *about* God” (Hart 1999:9). Other ways of saying this are “experiencing God” or “having a personal relationship with God.” Systematic theology is normally done by dealing with the individual subjects or concepts chronologically as they appear in the Bible. A typical example would be the following list of subjects: General Introduction to Theology (Studying God), Revelation (How God makes Himself known), God (What God is like), Creation (What God does), Humanity, Sin, Christ, Salvation (Soteriology), Holy Spirit (Pneumatology), the Church (Ecclesiology), and the Last Things (Eschatology) - (This format or Table of Contents is a combination taken from Erickson 1998 and Hart 1999).

The early beginnings of systematic theology and orthodoxy date back prior to the Early Church’s confessions or creeds, to the Old Testament Mosaic Covenant God made with the children of Israel/Israelites (e.g., the Ten Commandments of Exod 20:1-17; the confession of God’s attributes by Moses at Mt. Sinai in Exod 34:6-7, repeated in Num 14:18; Neh 9:17, 31-2; Ps 103:8; Jer 32:17-20; Jonah 4:2; and the *Shema* of Deut 6:4-9). According to Church Historian David Dorries, the Early Church then accepted the Old Testament Canon at the Synod of Jamnia

(AD 70-100) – (2002:13). The Early Church’s confessions or creeds were normally spoken at conversion or upon baptism. The most simple of these was the declaration, “Jesus is Lord” of Romans 10:9-10, 1 Corinthians 12:3, and the expanded version of Philipians 2:6-11. Additionally, there was the Gospel encapsulated in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 (the complete Eschatological Gospel is embodied by the entirety of chapter 15), and what has become known as the Apostles’ Creed, which was later expanded by the Nicene and Athanasian Creeds as a result of the Ecumenical Councils of the fourth to sixth centuries (Hart 1999:13-15). According to Larry D. Hart, “Creed is taken from the Latin word, *credo*; which is an action verb referring to a life-commitment exhibited by a confession or profession of faith” (Hart 1999:13) – (For more information on the Creeds of Christendom and their History, see Leith 1982 and Schaff 1993, vols. 1, 2 and 3). Additionally, the “Rule of Faith” was attested to by Irenaeus, Tertullian, Origen, and Athanasius as revealed truth reflected in the baptismal confession, the Scriptures and the preaching of the Church (Dorries 2002:12; Hagglund 1968:45, 50, 53, 65, 79).

The term orthodoxy comes from the following two Greek words: *orthos*, literally meaning right, rising, perpendicular (erect), or horizontal (level/direct), which came to mean straight or upright (Zodhiates 1991:52, 941, 1127); and *dokeo*, meaning to believe, to think, to have the appearance, or to count for something (or *doxa*, meaning glory, repute, splendor, reflection, or image) – (Kittel and Friedrich 1985:178). Therefore, the term orthodoxy could be translated as straight or right-thinking, belief or image (i.e., right belief). *The Encyclopedia of Religion* defines orthodoxy as, “correct or sound belief according to an authoritative norm”; and heterodoxy as, “belief in a doctrine differing from the norm” (Eliade 1987, 11:124). According to H. E. W. Turner, the Christian view of orthodoxy was founded on the teachings of Jesus and the tradition of the Apostolic Church (“a virgin undefiled”). For the first two centuries of the

Early Church, this translated to “The Rule of Truth/Faith,” or “*Kerugma* Faith” (or Gospel/Good News Faith) and baptismal creeds, based on the Old Testament understanding of *Yahweh* and the coming of the Messiah. By the end of the second century, this translated to an accepted canonicity of the four Gospels and other selective apostolic writings. This then was integrated into the Creed from the Council of Nicea (amplified by the Formula from the Council of Chalcedon). And finally, the basis and ultimate authority for all Christian orthodoxy became the complete Canon of the New Testament Scriptures, which was officially closed at the Council of Carthage (AD 397) – (Dorries 2002:13). From this firm foundation, came the other two means of determining orthodoxy: tradition (historic faith of the Church) and reason (based on a tension between faith/spirituality and reason) – (Turner 1978:3-6, 15-16, 167, 196-7, 312, 390-5, 475-9).

According to Alan W. Gomes, the central (core) doctrines of the Christian faith are as follows:

. . . the Trinity, the deity of Christ, the bodily resurrection, the atoning work of Christ on the cross, and salvation by grace through faith. These doctrines so comprise the essence of the Christian faith that to remove any of them is to make the belief system non-Christian. . . .

All Christian denominations—whether Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, or Protestant—agree on the essential core. The relatively minor disagreements between genuinely Christian denominations then cannot be used to argue that there is no objectively recognized core of fundamental doctrine which constitutes the Christian faith” [emphasis added] (Gomes 1995:10-11). (*Note that four out of the five basic core doctrines of orthodoxy deal directly with the Eschatological Gospel of Both Comings of Jesus Christ*).

The Early Church creedal confessions were refined by the Catholic Church during the Medieval Church Period into dogmas. *Dogma* is a Greek word which basically means decree or doctrine (Kittel and Friedrich 1985:178). These dogmas eventually became the various confessions of denominational beliefs after the Reformation. A partial listing of various confessions is provided as follows: The Augsburg Confession (1530), The Council of Trent (1543-63), The Heidelberg Catechism (1563), The Second Helvetic Confession (1566), The

Thirty-nine Articles of Religion (1571), The Five Arminian Articles (1610), The Canons of the Synod of Dort (1618-9), Westminster Confession of Faith (1646), and The Baptist Confession of 1689 (Hart 1999:23; spurgeon.org/~phil/creeds/; Schaff 2002, 3:Table of Contents). From these denominational confessions of orthodoxy came one of the most concise, balanced, graphic approaches to theology and orthodoxy, possibly of all time: “the Wesleyan Quadrilateral.” This theological view was based on the following four sources of determining orthodoxy: 1) Scripture, the sixty-six canonical books of the Bible; 2) tradition, taken from the Church Fathers’ writings and Church traditions which correlate with Scripture; 3) reason, given as a gift inherent with the image of God and to be used in concert with godly wisdom from the Scriptures; and finally 4) experience, taken from the daily interaction with the Holy Spirit’s presence and witness to God’s grace and love in the individual believer’s life (The term “Wesleyan Quadrilateral” was coined by American Methodist Albert C. Outler in his 1964 collection of John Wesley’s works entitled *John Wesley*). Quadrilateral is somewhat of a misnomer since this foundation of orthodoxy is based primarily on the Scripture. The three remaining sources are built upon that firm foundation (www.theopedia.com/Wesleyan_Quadrilateral:1; www.absoluteastronomy.com/topics/Wesleyan_Quadrilateral:1-2; www.indwes.edu/quadrilateral/checks:1-3; archives.umc.org/interior.asp?mid=258&GID=312&GMOD=VWD&GCAT=W:1). The foundation for the discussion of heresy is then formed from the above definition of heterodoxy—belief in a doctrine differing from the norm (another, different doctrine).

The term heresy comes from the Greek word *haireisis*, classically meaning seizure, choice or resolve, which led to the meaning of “choice of opinion,” associated with a certain teaching, school or sect (Kittel and Friedrich 1985:27-8). This understanding is further amplified by *The*

Encyclopedia of Religion to mean, “. . . a received opinion from a philosophical school, party or religious doctrinal system and its adherents.” Within the context of the Christian Church, heresy is viewed in a decidedly negative sense as an erroneous teaching, or a sect with erroneous (or false) beliefs (Eliade 1987, 6:269-70). The glossary to *Eerdmans Handbook to Christian Belief* continues with the thought that heresy was a Christian teaching that split off from and contradicted orthodox Christianity, and which came to mean a teaching that subverts central Christian beliefs; e.g., Trinity, Divinity of Christ, Atonement (Keeley 1982:468).

Although the traditional meaning for cult is “a group of people,” for the purposes of this thesis, a cult may be defined as a group of people that holds to one or more anti-Christian, heretical beliefs or doctrines. Some cults call themselves Christian and may be dubbed pseudo-Christian (e.g., Jehovah’s Witnesses, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Christian Science, The Unity School of Christianity, The Way International, The Unification Church (Moonies), and some New Age cults). Other cults do not claim to be Christian and are decidedly non-Christian (e.g., Scientology, Baha’i Faith, Freemasonry, Hinduism, Illuminati, Islam, Buddhism, Wicca (Witchcraft), Satanism, and some other New Age cults) – (Tsoukalas 1999:xxi-xxiii). This discussion of heresy and cults directly corresponds to the definition of orthodoxy addressed above and the five-fold central core beliefs of Christianity: *the Trinity, the deity of Christ, the bodily resurrection, the atoning work of Christ on the cross, and salvation by grace through faith* [emphasis added]. For the purposes of this thesis, it is to this concise standard of orthodoxy (which is completely congruent with the Eschatological Gospel of Both Comings of Jesus Christ outlined in both Old and New Testaments) that all heresies and cults will be compared.

In the seventeenth century, theologians began to organize or systematize beliefs, dogmas, and confessions into theology or dogmatics. It was at that time the term “eschatology” came into being in systematic theology, as a technical term used by Lutheran dogmatics to express their final section of theology relating to death, resurrection, last judgment, eternal life, and the end of the world (Dalferth 1995:157). Specifically, the term “eschatology” was first coined by Philipp Heinrich Friedlieb in 1644 and later used by Abraham Calov in 1677 in conjunction with “the end” mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15:24, “then comes *the end*, when He delivers up the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power [emphasis added]” (Sauter 1996:136). From these beginnings, sprang various systematic views of theology in general and eschatology and the Eschatological Gospel specifically.