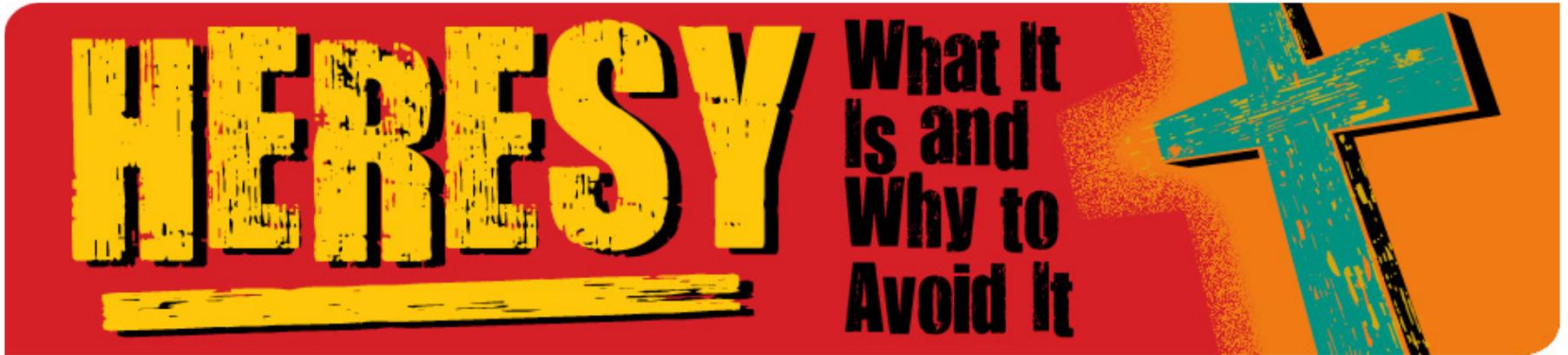


*The Rev. Dr. L. G. Bloomquist*  
(available at [bloomquist.ca](http://bloomquist.ca))



# Which of the following statements are heretical:

1. Jesus is the son of God.
2. “I just can’t believe that Jesus is God”
3. Mary is the mother of God.
4. Knowledge of Christ saves us.
5. The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son.
6. Faithful Christians must separate themselves from ministers who have betrayed the gospel.
7. There’s a little bit of God in each of us.
8. There are 39 books in the Old Testament (Genesis – Malachi).
9. “I was a Christian; now I know it’s just nonsense.”
10. The Anglican Church does not believe that the Pope has any authority over it.

Definition, magisterial pronouncement, historical, and ....

# Various ways to talk about “heresy”

# By Definition

- ◎ “A belief or opinion that does not agree with the official belief or opinion of a particular religion” (*Merriam-Webster*)
  - Originally meant simply to choose (“Heresy” come from the Greek word hairesis “choice”.)
  - Eventually it meant “choosing” in a way that was at odds with an already established choice.
    - Religions, political parties, etc. with established practices and beliefs consider choices to do or believe OTHER things as “heresy”.

# By magisterial pronouncement

- ◎ “Incredulity is the neglect of revealed truth or the willful refusal to assent to it. Heresy is the obstinate post-baptismal denial of some truth which must be believed with divine and catholic faith, or it is likewise an obstinate doubt concerning the same; apostasy is the total repudiation of the Christian faith; schism is the refusal of submission to the Roman Pontiff or of communion with the members of the Church subject to him.” ([\*Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2089\*](#))
  - NB: No statement on heresy in ACNA catechism

# Historically

- ⦿ Examine the history of the church to identify deviations from accepted Christian teaching...
  - Acts 8: Simon
  - Galatians 2: Paul's encounter with Peter
  - Arianism... middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century
  - Priscillianism... late 3<sup>rd</sup> century
- ⦿ But, what was accepted Christian teaching?

# The classical historical view

- The Church began with pure and undefiled teaching of Jesus and the apostles
- Deviance from this pure teaching (heresy) happened later in a few places because of factionalism, quests for novelty, incorporation of pagan or Jews teaching...

H. E. W. Turner, *The Pattern of Christian Truth: A Study in the Relations Between Orthodoxy and Heresy in the Early Church* (Bampton Lectures 1954; London: Mowbray, 1954), pp. 3-8.

# The revisionist historical view

- Early Christian thought was much more fluid (a “symphony” not a “single theme”)
- Division and difference were the norm in early Christianity
- Doctrinal development and accepted teaching only occurred over time

# The historical reality

- ⦿ The classical view over-estimated doctrinal fixity and unity in the early church
- ⦿ The revisionist view over-estimated the fluidity or flexibility of doctrine
- ⦿ Orthodoxy resulted from fixed and flexible teaching for determining Christian truth
  - Some truths (revealed in Scripture) were fixed (God can be known as Father, The Word is divine, There is a Holy Spirit ...)
  - Some issues are unclear or ambiguous (even in Scripture) and only become clear in hindsight

# Heresy's positive historical role

- ⦿ Heresy pushed the church
  - to clarify its doctrine in areas of ambiguity, and
  - to make fixed what was flexible.
- ⦿ Classic examples:
  - We would not have a Bible were it not for the heresies of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century!
  - We would not have the major creeds and statements about Jesus, the Spirit, etc. were it not for the need to clarify doctrine over against “heresy”.

# The historical approach as we will use it in our these sessions

- ◎ Let's start with another test:
  - Think of a sickness that you can live with...
    - What are its symptoms?
    - What is the treatment required?
  - Now think of a sickness that will kill you...
    - What are its symptoms?
    - How long can you last with your sickness?
    - What is the treatment required?

# Looking at heresy as pathology

- ⦿ Heresy = a disease or disorder of the Body of Christ that will eventually prove fatal (to the one who has it, or to the ones to whom it is passed on “recessively”)
  - Heresy is not a “disease” from which you will automatically get better, or that you will grow out of.
  - It is a disease that you will die from (unless treated) or that you will cause others to die from (unless treated).
- ⦿ As with many diseases, we don’t always know beforehand that something is a disease or a fatal one, or that we have a disease!
  - Church didn’t always know that something would be heresy at the start!

# The “Top 5 Heresies”: A pathology

- ⊙ Examples (“cases”, past and recurring)
  - We will identify the “top 5” diseases that eventually proved fatal to Christians and churches
- ⊙ Establish a pathology...
  - The causes of these Top 5 fatal diseases
  - The defining characteristics (“symptoms”)
  - The results or consequences
- ⊙ Identify treatment that was and still is effective
  - Though remembering that diseases mutate!

# Our goal is not just pathology

- ◎ We are not interested in the simple identification and treatment of disease
  - Not just doing this as an historical exercise.
- ◎ But rather... freeing people from a potentially fatal disease in order to live
  - Our goal = to lead the Church out of the threat or even clutches of death and into greater fullness of life!

# An ongoing task

- ⦿ Treatment can be effective for individuals, but diseases are never fully eliminated
- ⦿ Heresies recur over time and in new contexts...
  - Jehovah's Witnesses are a new form of Arianism
  - New Age Christianities are a new form of Gnosticism
- ⦿ So, don't forget, when it comes to heresy...



Fatal teaching regarding the Holy Spirit

# Heresy Number 5

# Historical Examples

- ⦿ Fatal teaching is not to deny the existence of a “holy spirit” of God
  - Almost no examples of this because of Scripture’s regular mention of Holy Spirit
- ⦿ Fatal teaching has been to ...
  - Diminish the importance of the Holy Spirit
  - Over-emphasize the Holy Spirit

# Two historical examples: One

- Diminishment: “Pneumatomachians”  
(*Spirit-fighters*)
  - Council of Nicaea (AD 325): ‘We believe in the Holy Spirit’
  - Macedonius (a mid-3<sup>rd</sup> century bishop of Constantinople): The Spirit is a creature, an angel (cf. Heb 1:14) – The Spirit and the Son are not equals

# Two historical examples: Two

## ◎ Over-emphasis: Montanus

- A late 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D. charismatic movement in Asia Minor, led by a newly baptized layman, named Montanus
- Montanus asserted that the Holy Spirit spoke uniquely through him (and his close followers Priscilla and Maximilla) and that their words constituted new revelation (equal to or greater than that of Scriptures)
- Montanism began as a basically Christian movement but began to preach an exclusive reliance on the Spirit to direct a rigorous, personal ethic and life-style

# The pathology

- The originators of these heresies were not “bad” people
- The problem was that Scripture is not as clear as we might like on the identity of the Holy Spirit
  - Holy Spirit most clearly identified as a power of God (not God)

# Why is this disease fatal?

## ⦿ Diminishment:

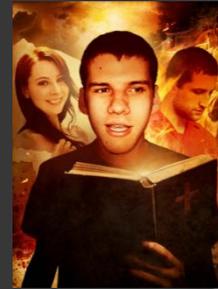
- A diminished approach to the Spirit leads to an impoverished life in Christ.
  - Material things, even angels, can become imperfect.

## ⦿ Over-emphasis:

- Over-emphasis usually leads to division
  - Competing voices of the Spirit
  - A guru (“me”!) has fullness of truth at the expense of others. (“The Spirit told me...”)

# Recurrence in history?

- ◎ Diminishment is most common
  - “The forgotten person of the Trinity” (an add-on to belief, like our appendix!)
- ◎ Over-emphasis has become more common because of tendencies within the Pentecostal / charismatic movement
  - But now Eastern Orthodoxy?



[“Love and death in the House of Prayer”](#)

# The basis for an effective treatment (i.e., healthy teaching)

- ⦿ Against diminishment: If the Spirit is God, then the Spirit is full of life and perfect goodness and not subject to the flaws of created things ([Cappadocian theologians](#))
- ⦿ Makes divine (i.e., able to share in a divine inheritance) what is imperfect
  - ⦿ Angels and other spirits do not share in the divine inheritance
- ⦿ Against over-emphasis: The Spirit primarily brings a spirit of service (bringing the Body of Christ to full perfection through unity not division (cf. 1 Corinthians))
- ⦿ [How to quench the disease without quenching the Spirit?](#)

# Niceno-Constantinopolitan creed (AD 381)

- “I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father (and the Son), who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified, who spoke by the prophets”
  - “I believe”: Not “The Holy Spirit is the Lord (or God)”
  - “The Lord”: Not “in God the Holy Spirit” (*Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. 2 Cor 3:17*) – NB: “God” is not used of the Holy Spirit in Scripture
  - “The giver of life”: Our life in Christ – our freedom – comes from the Spirit, and that free life is to be lived in service to others as Paul teaches
  - “Who proceeds from the Father and the Son”: The Spirit does not come to us from within our world but from before time and leads us to both Father and Son
  - “Worshipped and glorified with the Father and the Son”: Deserving of the same reverence as both Father and Son, who are identified as God
  - “Who spoke by the prophets”: Don’t neglect the OT (also cf. Hebrews 1:1) and also test the prophets!

# The life that comes from treatment (i.e., the value of healthy teaching)

- ◎ There can be no life in Christ and no freedom in Christ without the Spirit
  - Lent is a good time to imagine what life would be like without the fullness of the Spirit.
    - Lived on our own, serving ourselves
  - Lent is also a good time to get ready to learn what a full, healthy life in the Spirit looks like.
    - The church calendar gives us 40 days of Lent and 50 days of Easter as the start to a life to be lived out in the Spirit over more than 200 days during the period of Pentecost!

# For further reference...

- ◎ M. A. Haykin, [Rediscovering the Church Fathers: Who They Were and How They Shaped the Church](#) (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2011).
- ◎ B. Quash and M. Ward eds., [Heresies and How to Avoid Them: Why It Matters What Christians Believe](#) (foreword by S. Hauerwas; London: SPCK and Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2007).
- ◎ H. E. W. Turner, [The Pattern of Christian Truth: A Study in the Relations Between Orthodoxy and Heresy in the Early Church](#) (Bampton Lectures, 1954; London: A.R. Mowbray, 1954).

For a wild romp through the fields of medieval heresies and belief, see the novel by Umberto Eco, [Baudolino](#) (translated from the Italian by W. Weaver; New York: Harcourt, Inc., 2002), as well as the film by Luis Buñuel, *La voie lactée* (1969) – some graphic images.