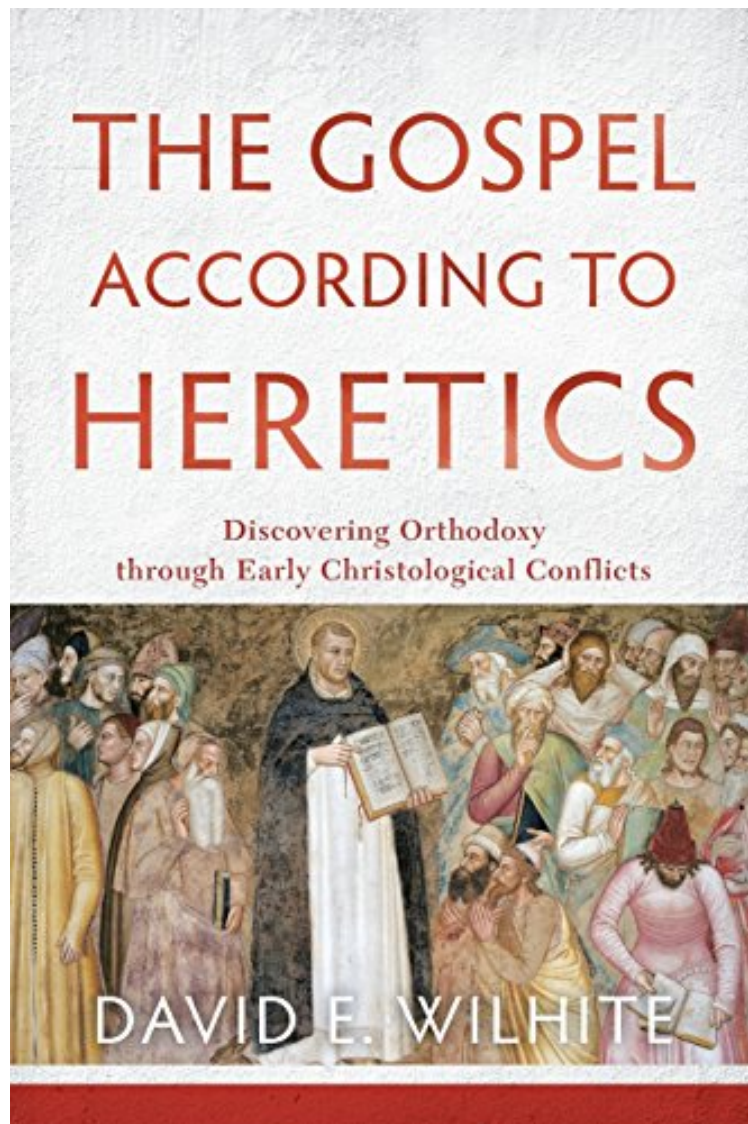


(Ebook free) The Gospel according to Heretics: Discovering Orthodoxy through Early Christological Conflicts

The Gospel according to Heretics: Discovering Orthodoxy through Early Christological Conflicts

David E. Wilhite

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David E. Wilhite : The Gospel according to Heretics: Discovering Orthodoxy through Early Christological Conflicts before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Gospel according to Heretics: Discovering Orthodoxy through Early Christological Conflicts:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Fantastic! By Andy Wilhite presents a balanced view of 10 christological heresies and their accompanying orthodox response. In addition, there is a well stated conclusion dealing with modern heresy and orthodox response. I found this book to be a refreshing perspective on heresy and Christological issues.

0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars By James Peckham A6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Anathematize Them: A Review of David Wichita's *The Gospel according to Heretics* By Joseph Johnson Why should the Church ever listen to heretics? How do you define a heretic in the first place? In David Wilhite's engaging and informative introduction to the early christological conflicts of the Church, *The Gospel according to Heretics*, he takes on these questions and more with admirable clarity, depth, and sensitivity. Wilhite teaches at George W. Truett Seminary in Texas and specializes in the study of North African Christianity in late antiquity, giving him a good background for taking readers into the world of the Patristic era. In much traditional Christian thinking, heretics were viewed as evil and malicious (p.2). They were to be avoided and their voices were to be silenced if efforts to persuade ended in failure. The early church father Irenaeus, in his work *Against Heresies*, records that the Apostle John supposedly once fled from a building in order to avoid the heretic Corinthus (3.3.4). Ignatius also exhorted readers in his *Letter to the Trallians* to, cover up your ears in order to avoid receiving the things being sown by them (9). At first glance, defining heresy doesn't seem so hard, and at one level, it isn't: a heretic is someone who holds to false, incorrect teachings that have been rejected by the catholic, universal Church as being outside the boundaries of acceptable Christian belief (p.12). This brings up the complication, however, of who gets to decide what constitutes true doctrine, since heretics often insisted that they were the true orthodox believers and that their opponents were the real heretics. Thus, Wilhite writes: The point is that in the earliest Christian centuries one couldn't simply say orthodoxy is the teaching that is true to the Scriptures, because both the Scriptures and their interpretation were being contested. The often-ill-defined core of the Christian faith not a creed, not a set of Scriptures, but the gospel of Jesus Christ as known in the apostolic preaching and tradition was the stated difference between orthodox and unorthodox. (p.16) It's pretty safe to say that the early Church did not interact with heretics sympathetically, viewing them instead primarily as dangerous. In *The Gospel according to Heretics*, Wilhite questions whether this approach was at times too polemical, leading orthodox writers to sometimes demonize and misrepresent the views of their opponents (p.2). He adds: The best historical studies of the last century have found evidence to suggest that our understanding of the heretics is so one-sided as to need revising. This book attempts to take this scholarly assessment seriously, extensively revising our understanding of each heresy. Beyond an understanding of the heresies themselves, such a study of the various unorthodox alternatives that shaped traditional Christian thinking offers those who wish to understand their own orthodoxy a more complete picture. (p.7) Re-examining the early Church's Christological conflicts is a provocative undertaking, so Wilhite does well to add a few clarifications in his introduction. He isn't seeking mere sensationalism (think the *Da Vinci Code*), and he also isn't advocating a hyper-skeptical stance toward traditional Christian thought (pp.3-4). Just because an orthodox writer charges a heretic with immorality and denying the resurrection doesn't mean that we can conclude the heretical figure must have been a paragon of virtue and believed in Christ's physical resurrection. Wilhite writes that: This need for critical reading arises simply because of the admitted bias of the orthodox sources. They explicitly claim to be attacking what they think is a false and even dangerous teaching. The orthodox writers, therefore, have tried to tip the scales in their favor as much as possible something everyone did at that time (p.4). He also warns that those attempting to critically read orthodox and heretical sources must avoid repeating the mistakes of the 20th century search for the historical Jesus (p.5). It's all too easy to produce a historical reconstruction of the past only to find out that it has sadly become a self-portrait. Complete objectivity may be unobtainable, but that doesn't leave scholars stuck in a morass of absolute subjectivity. Wilhite correctly argues that, Even if we accept Nietzsche's claim that there are no facts, only interpretations, we can also move past him with Clifford Geertz and insist that some interpretations are better than others (p.7). Throughout the book, he takes readers on a case-by-case basis through ten early Church christological controversies, from early ones like Marcionism and Docetism to later struggles such as Apollinarianism and Monophysitism. To get a clearer picture of Wilhite's project, let's briefly look at his discussion of the Apollinarian controversy. The story of Apollinaris begins promisingly enough. His father, termed Apollinaris the Elder by historians, was a priest in the Laodicean church. Both father and son hosted the famous anti-Arian figure Athanasius on his way back to Alexandria at the end of his second exile. Apollinaris was a strong proponent of Nicene christology (pp.130-131). Unlike the Arians, Apollinaris had no difficulties affirming Jesus' fully divine status (p.131). The problem, as Wilhite puts it, is that, Apollinaris, with other Apollinarians like Vitalis, so emphasized Christ's divinity that he allegedly lost sight of Christ's humanity (p.132). In Wilhite's eyes, this was in part because some of the technical terms being used by Apollinaris were a bit ambiguous, especially the term hypostasis: This Greek word has the sense of existence. The question is whether it implies something's inner being (i.e. essence) or whether it refers to a specific being (i.e. individual or entity). If it means inner being, then it would be synonymous with essence or even nature, and then God the Father and the Son are one hypostasis/Being. On the other hand, if it implies an individual, then God the Father and the Son are two different hypostases, or (we would say) persons. (pp.134-135). Apollinaris sided with the Nicene view that hypostasis should be understood to mean (in English) person, rather than nature, thereby affirming that the three persons of the Godhead are

three in person while one in essence. He went on to insist that the Word of God incarnate was one hypostasis, not two. Wilhite tells readers that, Some of his opponents could hear this statement on the incarnation as reverting to the earlier meaning of hypostasis as nature, as in the Word incarnates one nature (p.136). For orthodox writers, this was a problem. Wilhite explains that, For Apollinariss enemies, this idea has several possible implications. One is that Christ might only have a divine nature (clearly Apollinaris is not Arian), and therefore that Christs one nature/hypostasis is not human (p.136). Another possibility would be that Christ only appeared to have a human nature, which falls into the error of Docetism. Apollinaris defended himself against these accusations by asserting that Christ was one hypostasis/person and therefore can suffer in the flesh, where the flesh is understood to mean the outer person or body (p.137). Wilhite adds, Whereas the inner person is normally identified as the soul, Apollinaris simply taught that the Word was Christs inner person. By using the term soul to express his idea, however, Apollinaris raised a number of problems (p.137). Conceptually the Greek word for soul (psyche) included things like the experience of human emotions and human reason. If Apollinariss Christ lacks a human psyche, then how can He be thought of as fully human? It seems that Apollinaris did not actually wish to deny that Jesus had a human psyche. According to Wilhite, Apollinaris later shifted his terminology and argued that the Word of God took on a man flesh and a human soul, but that the Word of God replaced what is normally thought of as the human mind (nous in Greek) (p.140). Ultimately, orthodox writers still saw this as an inadequate explanation of Jesus full humanity and divinity. In response, they argued that if being fully human means having a human body and soul, and a soul includes a human mind, then the Apollinarian denial of Christs nous still resulted in a subhuman Jesus. In the words of Gregory of Nazianzus, But if He has a soul, and yet is without a mind, how is He man, for man is not a mindless animal? And this would necessarily involve that while His form and tabernacle was human, His soul should be that of a horse or ox (Letter 101). Ultimately, Apollinariss teachings failed to satisfy the famous axiom previously employed against the gnostic heretics. Again, from Gregory of Nazianzus, For that which He has not assumed He has not healed; but that which is united to His Godhead is also saved (Critique of Apollinaris and Apollinarianism). By failing to truly assume a human body, the gnostic Christ failed to save/heal the human body. In the same way, orthodox writers concluded that by failing to truly assume a human mind, the Apollinarian Christ failed to save/heal the human mind, or worse yet, that Apollinaris did not see any need for it to be saved/healed in the first place (p.142). In the concluding chapter of *The Gospel according to Heretics*, Wilhite returns to the contested topic of how heresy should be defined. Throughout the book, he has shown that heretics were more often misguided than malicious. So how does he define it? Wilhite concludes that: Heresy is an inadequate attempt to articulate the gospel. Heresy, then, is a truncated gospel. It is preaching a different gospel not that there is another gospel, but there are some who are confusing you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ (Gal. 1:6-7), and so it must be anathematized (1:9) as heresy. Notice that Paul does not claim his opponents teach falsehood. They simply neglect the full expression of what Christ has done. (p. 248) More often than not, it was only in response to some heretical teaching that the Church formally articulated Christian doctrines (think of the Patristic councils like Nicaea and Chalcedon). In Wilhites eyes, this doesnt necessarily mean that the Church was making up doctrine. I like how he explains it when he writes that the search for orthodox doctrine is not a defense of previously stated doctrine, nor a complete fabrication, but a search for something that is real and waiting to be encountered and discovered (p.251). Wilhites *The Gospel according to Heretics* is a fascinating introductory work that takes readers on a guided tour to the depths of the debates. Its a good first read for those who are curious about why terms like homoousios were worth fighting about. Even for those like myself who have read a few books about early Church heresies before, it is an enjoyable book that is worth the read. I recommend it. Disclosure: I received this book free from Baker Academic through the Baker Academic Bloggers program. The opinions I have expressed are my own, and I was not required to write a positive review. I am disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commissions 16 CFR, Part 255 http://www.access.gpo.gov/nara/cfr/waisidx_03/16cfr255_03.html.

Since what Christian doctrine denies can be as important as what it affirms, it is important to understand teachings about Jesus that the early church rejected. Historians now acknowledge that proponents of alternative teachings were not so much malicious malcontents as they were misguided or even misunderstood. Here a recognized expert in early Christian theology teaches orthodox Christology by explaining the false starts (heresies), making the history of theology relevant for today's church. This engaging introduction to the christological heresies is suitable for beginning students. In addition, pastors and laypeople will find it useful for apologetic purposes.

From the Back Cover "Written with good humor, clarity, insight, and sensitivity to various religious traditions, Wilhite's volume presents ten heresies of early Christianity that introduce the nonspecialist reader to the problematic questions of just what these heretics, as later defined, believed and why those beliefs were later condemned. I know of no better introduction to the topic to put into the hands of students and scholars alike."--Geoffrey D. Dunn, Centre for Early Christian Studies, Australian Catholic University "In the rapidly growing web of interpretations of early Christianity, this well-informed, popularizing study brings about order without imposing simplicity and addresses

conflict without attempting to solve it. Turning 'orthodoxy' and 'heresy' with dexterity and caution into analytical tools, Wilhite offers his readers effective insight into the complex world of the early church. His account is neither about winners nor about losers; what it offers instead is a strategy for piecing together a credible early Christian narrative in which history meets theology and both can benefit from the encounter."--Willemien Otten, University of Chicago

"This book takes readers from the shallow end of the pool of early Christian theology into deep waters and enables them to float. It gives heresies their due while always keeping at least one eye on the positive message of Christian truth--that is, it is not transfixed by 'the dark side.' It is written with clarity both conceptually and in terms of expression, while being impressively learned. I appreciate in particular the attempt to discuss Reformed Protestantism in a retelling of the iconoclastic controversy and to broach the delicate and intricate subject of early Christian theology in relation to nascent Islam. It is quite a breathtaking achievement."--Mark W. Elliott, University of St. Andrews

"This volume is a thoughtful and refreshing contribution to both academia and the church. Avoiding sensationalism, skepticism, and subjectivism, Wilhite carefully reinterprets heresy and orthodoxy with theological nuance, historical acumen, and ecclesial sensitivity. I commend this insightful and accessible book to scholars and students alike as readers are invited to search for the gospel according to orthodoxy, rooted in the grace of Christ, through the gospel according to heresy."--Helen Rhee, Westmont College

About the Author David E. Wilhite (PhD, University of St. Andrews) is associate professor of theology at George W. Truett Theological Seminary, Baylor University, in Waco, Texas. He is the author of *Tertullian the African*, coauthor of *The Church: A Guide for the Perplexed*, and coeditor of *Tertullian and Paul*.