

Márkus Máté

ORTHODOXY AND HETERODOXY

INTRODUCTION

The word “relevance” is derived from the Latin word *relevare*, meaning: to raise (*levare*) again (*re*). It was probably not introduced into Hungarian from Latin, but indirectly, from other European languages. In Old French, the word *relever* means both to raise, to resurrect, to revive. If the term relevance implies the experience of resurrection or revitalization, we must ask the question: when is an object relevant, revitalizing? When can we re-think our situation based on it?

The sermon must be relevant. This axiomatic statement means that a sermon must be situational, but it also means, by the origin of the word relevant, *relevare*, that by being situational, a sermon must also be such that by it one can re-think his situation. If the sermon must be relevant or situational, then the preacher must have a system of thought about the situation of man. But in what way should we think about the situation of man? That is what this article is about.

THE WAYS OF ORTHODOXY AND HETERODOXY

The question of the situation of man is posed by all dogmatics. Even that dogmatics whose object is God, and God is the object of all dogmatics. The word dogmatics comes from the Greek word *dogma*, which means thought.¹ Dogmatics is the thinking of which God is the object. Yet there has never been a dogmatics that did not think about man by thinking about God. It is impossible to think about God without an implication regarding man, and the situation of man. The reason for this must be sought in the question of God. What do we mean by God? By God we understand the “object” that is the ultimate condition of all objects. Therefore, although it is infinitely beyond all objects, the “object” God applies to all objects, including man. It is necessary that if our object is God, then man must also be our object, because God is the object that applies to all objects, including man, or else our object is not God. This is the dependent relation between the knowledge of God and the knowledge of man.

¹ Paul Tillich: *The History of Christian Thought*, New York, Harper and Row, Publishers, 1968, xi-xii.

In the history of dogma, that is, in the history of the thought that makes God its object, there are two schools of thought from the beginning. The source of *dogma* or thought is experience. It is impossible to think without experience. But there are two sources of experience: the experience of the self and the experience of others. In the understanding of the self, the source of every dogma throughout dogma history is the experience of others; the experience expressed in the Scripture (1 John 1:1) – regardless of having the authority of divine self-disclosure. Thus, the two modes of thought that appear in the history of the dogma are the one that draws from the experience of “others” alone, and the one that draws from the experience of “others” and “self”.

Accordingly, we can call the way of thinking either orthodox or heterodox. The argument against the use of these terms is that the word orthodox in the days of the early church referred to the truthfulness of dogma or thought, and that which was other (*hetero*) than true (*ortho*) was false. Since the Reformation, however, the word orthodox has referred not to the truthfulness of dogma or thought but to its source. If the dogma is based on the *Scripture*, which is the experience of others, then it is orthodox.

Unfortunately, in the later history of dogma, dogmatics, and thought that draws not from one but from several sources, from the experience of “others” and “self”, was not called heterodox, but liberal, because heterodox as a synonym for heretical had already “worn out” in the early church. The word liberal, however, apart from being used in aspects incompatible with traditional Christian ethics, does not express the characteristic of the way of thinking it denotes, namely that it draws on a variety of sources of experience. I will therefore use the adjective orthodox in the *homodox* sense and the adjective heterodox in the liberal sense.

The aim of thinking is to structure reality. Both orthodox and heterodox thinking aim at structuring reality. However, because orthodox thinking seeks to structure reality solely from the experience of others, it ends up structuring not reality but the experience of others—namely, the experience expressed in the *Scriptura* (1 John 1:1). Therefore, instead of structuring reality on the basis of the experience expressed in the *Scriptura*, orthodoxy tends to create, alongside the reality of the self, another reality that is supposed to be expressed in the *Scriptura*. The source of orthodoxy is experience expressed in the *Scriptura* alone, that is what the principle of *Sola Scriptura* means. However, the representatives of orthodoxy ignore the fact that the Catholic Church created its dogmas, against which the principle of *Sola Scriptura* had to be asserted, precisely because the medieval experience of the self and the experience expressed in

the *Scripture* did not coincide. In fact, the dogmas of the Catholic Church sought to express the experience of the self and to give it equal authority with the *Scriptura*. Which naturally led, over time, to the emergence of a third experience of reality, expressed in the dogmas, in addition to the experience of the self and the experience of the *Scriptura*. The Reformation was able to assert the principle of *Sola Scriptura* because it was able to unite the Pauline experience of reality expressed in the *Scriptura* with the medieval experience of the self in the matter of justification.

The sole source of orthodoxy is the experience of others, as expressed in the *Scriptura*, with the authority of the divine. The source of heterodoxy is the reality experienced by the self *and* others with the authority of the divine as well. But the cause of divine authority is different. In the case of orthodoxy, the ultimate cause of the divine authority of the *Scriptura* is that it is God's self-disclosure. Who confirms this? The Holy Spirit. This is the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit (*Testimonium Sanctum Spiritum*). It is in fact the experience of the self, which, in other words, perhaps can be and is experienced by others outside the Protestant denominations. So, while the source of orthodoxy is solely the experience of others with a divine authority, and divine authority gives exclusivity to them, this divine authority is the experience of the self.

In the case of heterodoxy, the divine authority of the source is not the divine self-revelatory character, as in the case of orthodoxy, but the authenticity of the source. The more authentic the source, the more divine authority it gives to the heterodox thinker. What does authenticity mean? For orthodoxy, *Scriptura* is a homogeneous material. All the material it contains has equal divine authority. For heterodoxy, *Scriptura* is a heterogeneous material, a collection of symbols. For the heterodox thinker, for the heterodox theologian who makes God his object, the different symbols have different authenticities. Symbols are objects that express the subject's experience of God as the ultimate object. For heterodoxy, the more universal the experience expressed in a symbol, the more authentic it is. And typically, the older the symbol, the more universal the experience it expresses, because the more it has passed the test of generations, i.e. it has been confirmed by newer and newer generations. This confirmation is expressed by the word '*amen*', taken from the Hebrew.

It is the heterogeneity of the symbols of the Bible, and indeed of the symbols as a whole that determines the method of the heterodox theologian. The heterodox theologian's method is to open up the experience of reality expressed in symbols, to compare it with the experience of reality expressed in other symbols and with the experience of the self, and to attempt to resolve

any contradictions. In other words, the heterodox theologian does not inquire into the truthfulness of biblical symbols, in which case he would not be a theologian, but into their meaning. He is not asking whether the resurrection is true, but what it means.

In terms of the question of what the situation of man is, our way of thinking can be either orthodox or heterodox. In the case of orthodoxy, we view man in terms of the *Scriptura*. Throughout its history, orthodoxy has grouped the material of the *Scriptura*, i.e., the biblical material, around dogmas, thoughts formulated in Latin (e.g., *creatura, imago Dei, peccatum originale, peccatum et peccata, concupiscentia, totus homo corruptus*). This is problematic because these dogmas and thoughts formulated in Latin, tend to be detached from the original biblical-theological concepts, and also because they can express realities (e.g., *resurrectio*) that do not match the reality of the self, i.e. they also tend to be detached from reality itself. It is then that orthodoxy creates other realities, speculative ones, and moreover, with divine authority.

In heterodoxy, man is viewed in terms of the experience of the self. The orthodox theologian makes man his subject in regard to his relationship with God. But what is the aspect in which the heterodox makes man his object? The heterodox theologian makes man his object in his most universal aspect, namely, in the aspect of his being, or, so to say, in his ontological aspect. Ontology is the science of being. The ancient Greeks also called it the first science, in that before the nature of a being can be inquired into by natural science, it is the “first” nature of that being that it is. The question of ontology is what it means to be. What is it that is common to the structure of all that is?² The heterodox theologian makes man his object in ontological terms because he knows that every being has an ultimate condition, which is being itself, every object has an ultimate “object”, an “object” that is infinitely beyond all objects, and which is therefore called God: the “object” God. This way the heterodox theologian is inquiring man in the very same aspect as the orthodox theologian, namely in his relation to the “object” God. Yet ontological experience always begins with the experience of the self. Heterodox thinking compares the ontological experience of the self with the experience expressed by symbols, and hence by biblical symbols. If the reality structure of the self and the reality structures expressed in the biblical symbols match, this can be seen as a kind of normative verification (see Heidegger's ontology and Bultmann's hermeneutics); if they do not match, then the

² Paul Tillich: *Love, Power, and Justice, Ontological Analyses and Ethical Applications*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1954, 18-20.

interpretative possibilities of the biblical symbols have to be rethought. This is the only way not to split or not to fissure reality into the reality of the self and another reality.

Our aim is to make the sermon relevant, that is, not only situational but also to revive one in his situation. To do this, the preacher must have a thought, or even a system of thought, in other words, a dogmatics, about man's situation. The way of thinking may be orthodox, but it may also be heterodox and both theological.

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