Heresy

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Heresy is a dislocation of some complete and self-supporting system of belief, especially a religion, by the introduction of a novel denial of some essential part therein.

The study of heresy is heresiology. The founder of a heresy is called a heresiarch.

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Etymology

The word "heresy" comes from the Greek αἵρεσις, hairesis (from αἱρέομαι, haireomai, "choose"), which means either a choice of beliefs or a faction of believers. It was given wide currency by Irenaeus in his tract Contra Haereses (Against Heresies) to describe and discredit his opponents in the early Christian Church. He described his own position as orthodox (from ortho- "right" + doxa "belief") and his position eventually evolved into the position of the early Christian Church.

Used in this way, the term "heresy" has no purely objective meaning; the category exists only from the point of view of speakers within a group that has previously agreed about what counts as "orthodox". Any nonconformist view within any field may be perceived as "heretical" by others within that field who are convinced that their view is "orthodox"; in the sciences this extension is made tongue-in-cheek.

Heretics usually do not define their own beliefs as heretical. Heresy is a value judgment and the expression of a view from within an established belief system. For instance, Roman Catholics held Protestantism as a heresy while some non-Catholics considered Catholicism the "Great Apostasy."

For a heresy to exist there must be an authorititative system of dogma designated as orthodox, such as those proposed by Catholicism. The term orthodox is used in Eastern Orthodoxy, some Protestant churches, in Islam, some Jewish denominations, and to a lesser extent in other religions. Variance from orthodox Marxism-Leninism is described as "right" or "left deviationism." The Church of Scientology uses the term "squirreling" to refer to unauthorized alterations of its teachings or methods.

Religious heresy
Christianity

In Christianity, heresy is a "theological or religious opinion or doctrine maintained in opposition, or held to be contrary, to the Roman Catholic or Orthodox doctrine of the Christian Church, or, by extension, to that of any church, creed, or religious system, considered as orthodox. By extension, heresy is an opinion or doctrine in philosophy, politics, science, art, etc., at variance with those generally accepted as authoritative."[1]

The use of the term "heresy" in the context of Christianity is less common today, with some notable exceptions: see for example Rudolf Bultmann and the "character" of debates over ordination of women and gay priests. Popular imagination relegates "heresy" to the Middle Ages, when the Church's power in Europe was at its height, but the case of the scholar and humanist Giordano Bruno was not the last execution for heresy. Heresy remained an officially punishable offense in Roman Catholic nations until the late 18th century. In Spain, heretics were prosecuted and punished during the Counter-Enlightenment movement of the restoration of the monarchy there after the Napoleonic Era. Furthermore, while it is often believed that the Roman Catholic church was primarily the instigator of persecution of heretics, the Protestant reformers including Martin Luther, John Calvin, Henry VIII and Elisabeth I all conducted inquisitions, tortures, and murders of non-Protestants they believed to be heretics.

Orthodox Judaism

Orthodox Judaism considers views on the part of Jews which depart from the traditional Jewish principles of faith to be heretical. In addition, mainstream Orthodox Judaism holds that all Jews who reject the simple meaning of Maimonides's 13 principles of Jewish faith are heretics.[2] As such, most of Orthodox Judaism considers Reform and Reconstructionist Judaism to be heretical movements, and regards most of Conservative Judaism as heretical. The liberal wing of Modern Orthodoxy is more tolerant of Conservative Judaism, particularly its right wing, as there is some theological and practical overlap between these groups.

The law "You shall not cut yourselves" (Deuteronomy 14:1) is interpreted by the Rabbis: "You shall not form divisions, but shall form one bond." (Source: Talmud Yevamot 13a, Midrash Sifre on Deuteronomy 96)

Besides the term "min" for "heretic," the Talmud uses the words "Hitsonim" (outsiders), "apikoros" (Epicurean), and "kofer ba-Torah" (R. H. 17a), or "kofeir ba-‘ikar"[3]" (he who denies the fundamentals of faith; Pes. xxiv. 168b). Similar statuses may apply to some of those branded "poresh mi-darke tsibbur" (he who deviates from the customs of the community; Tosef., Sanh. xiii. 5; R. H. 17a). Some authorities opine that all of these are consigned to Gehinnom for all eternity (Tosef., Sanh. l.c.; comp. ib. xii. 9, apparently belonging to xiii. 5: "He who casts off the yoke [of the Law], and he who severs the Abrahamic covenant; he who interprets the Torah against the halakic tradition, and he who pronounces in full the Ineffable Name —all these have no share in the world to come," or possibly have no afterlife at all.[4]

The Mishnah says the following have no share in the world to come: "He who denies that the Torah is divinely revealed, and the apikoros." R. Akiba says, "also he who reads heretical books". This is explained in the Talmud (Sanh. 100b) to mean "sifre Zedu'kim" (Sadducean writings); but this is an alteration by the censor of "sifre ha-Minim" (books of the Gnostics or Heretics). The Biblical version, "That ye seek not after your own heart" (Num. xv. 39), is explained (Sifre, Num. 115; Ber. 12b) as "Ye shall not turn to heretic views ["minut"] which lead your heart away from God" (see Maimonides, "Yad," 'Akkum, ii. 3).

In summarizing the Talmudic statements concerning heretics in Sanh. 90-103, Maimonides ("Yad," Teshubah, iii. 6-8) says:

"The following have no share in the world to come, but are cut off, and perish, and receive their
punishment for all time for their great sin: the minim, the apiḳoresim, they that deny the belief in the Torah, they that deny the belief in resurrection of the dead and in the coming of the Redeemer, the apostates, they that lead many to sin, they that turn away from the ways of the [Jewish] community... Five are called 'minim': (1) he who says there is no God and the world has no guide; (2) he who says the world has more than one guide; (3) he who ascribes to the Lord of the Universe a body and a figure; (4) he who says that God was not alone and Creator of all things at the world's beginning; (5) he who worships some star or constellation as an intermediating power between himself and the Lord of the World.

The following three classes are called 'apiḳoresim': (1) he who says there was no prophecy nor was there any wisdom that came from God and which was attained by the heart of man; (2) he who denies the prophetic power of Moses our master; (3) he who says that God has no knowledge concerning the doings of men.

The following three are called 'koferim ba-Torah': (1) he who says the Torah is not from God: he is a kofer even if he says a single verse or letter thereof was said by Moses of his own accord; (2) he who denies the traditional interpretation of the Torah and opposes those authorities who declare it to be tradition, as did Zadok and Boethus; and (3) he who says, as do the Nazarenes and the Mohammedans, that the Lord has given a new dispensation instead of the old, and that he has abolished the Law, though it was originally divine."

It is noteworthy, however, that Abraham ben David, in his critical notes, objects to Maimonides characterizing as heretics all those who attribute corporeality to God; and he insinuates that the Kabbalists (of his time) were not heretics. Similarly, Biblical critics who doubt or deny the Mosaic origin of every portion of the Pentateuch, would protest against this Maimonidean (or Talmudic; see Sanh. 99a) conception of heresy (some ascribe a similar view to Ibn Ezra based on his commentary to Deut. i. 2).

**Heresy of Islam**

Many in the two main bodies of Islam -- Sunnis and the Shi'as -- have regarded the other as heretical. Groups like the Sufis, the Hurufiya, the Alawis, the Bektashi and even the Ismailis have also been regarded as heretical by some. Although Sufism is often accepted as valid by Shi'a and some Sunnis, Sunni movements like Wahhabism view it as heretical.

Both the Ahmadiyya and the Nation of Islam are regarded by many Muslim Ulema as being apostate, but in the case of the Ahmadiyya movement, attitudes towards designating the sect apostatical, heretical or Islamic differ depending on region or Islamic schools of thought. In Pakistan, where most Ahmadis live, the state considers the group to be apostatical; whereas in the neighbouring state of Iran, the same group is considered to fall within the bounds of Islamic belief. Another example concerning the Ahmadiyya movement is the Al-Azhar Islamic University in Egypt, which accepts a certain Ahmadi belief concerning the nature of prophethood in Islam, considered by other schools as being heretical, to fall within Islamic jurisdiction.

Faiths like Druz and Baha'i although now separate religions, have their roots in Islam and were considered by some Muslims to be heresies when they first appeared since they emerged as alternative currents in Islamic culture, and were founded by people who were considered to be Muslims. Much as Christianity is viewed by some to be a Jewish heresy, or Islam a Christian heresy.

**Bid'ah in religious matters**

In Islam, bid'ah (Arabic: بدعة) or innovation in religion is forbidden. As Muhammad stated in a hadith:

“Whoever innovates something in this matter of ours [i.e., Islam] that is not a part of it, will have it rejected.” (Sahih al-Bukhari Vol 3, Book 49, 861 [5]; Sahih Muslim Book 18, 4266 [6]) In addition, the
Qur'an (which Muslims believe is the word of God) states:

"..This day, I have perfected your religion for you, completed My favor upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion."[7] (Qur'an 5; 3)

The late Muhammad ibn al Uthaymeen, a prominent Wahhabi modern day scholar of Islam, wrote: "And there is no such thing in Islaam as bid'ah hasanah (good innovation)." [8]

Muslims do not all agree on what constitutes bid`ah - or a new way of worshipping Allah - or whether innovation includes details of clothing, eating, drinking, speech, etc., or only more narrow religious matters. When a religious innovation is committed, it is generally felt that the innovator is assuming that the Sunnah is not good enough, that he must resort to something "better." There are some innovations that imply unbelief or shirk, and there are some that are rejected (even when committed in all sincerity) without casting doubt upon that person's status as a Muslim believer.

Some categories of believers and unbelievers in Islam are:

- Mu'min: A muslim believer.
- Fajir: A muslim who is wicked or an evil doer, a sinner (by action).
- Fasiq: A muslim who openly violates Islamic law.
- Munafiq: A hypocrite, one who believes in another religion but declares to be a muslim (sometimes also used in non religious context).
- Kafir: An unbeliever, an apostate from Islam, a person who hides, denies, or covers the truth.
- Zindiq: A previous muslim who no longer accepts Islam.
- Ahl al-Kitâb: "People of the Book", members of the monotheistic religions whose holy books share the Qur'an's origins, i.e. Jews and Christians

### Contemporary heresy

Today, heresy can be without a religious context as the holding of ideas that are in fundamental disagreement with the status quo in any practice and branch of knowledge. Religion is not a necessary component of the term's definition. The revisionist paleontologist Robert T. Bakker, who published his findings as The Dinosaur Heresies, jokingly treated the mainstream view of dinosaurs as dogma.

The term heresy is also used as an ideological pigeonhole for contemporary writers because by definition heresy depends on contrasts with an established orthodoxy. For example, the tongue-in-cheek contemporary usage of heresy, such as to categorize a "Wall Street heresy" or a "Republican heresy", are metaphors which invariably retain a subtext that links orthodoxies in geology or biology or any other field to religion. These expanded metaphoric senses allude to both the difference between the person's views and the mainstream, and the boldness of such a person in propounding these views.

In modern American history, the term heresy has been applied in the United States to the position of those Catholic politicians and voters who publicly profess support for abortion. In July 2004, the group De Fide achieved wide notoriety when it coined the expression "Right-to-Murder Heresy" in reference to abortion. It and 3,000 other Catholics filed the first "class-action" denunciation for heresy against Senator John F. Kerry, soon followed by more denunciations against four other well-known pro choice senators.

Following those events, in February 2006, Bishop Robert F. Vasa of the Diocese of Baker, Oregon widened the national debate by becoming the first sitting Roman Catholic Ordinary to publicly raise the question of heresy in reference to those who support or vote in favor of abortion.

On September 28, 2007, Gaston Hebert, the diocese administrator (per the July 11 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith) stated that 6 Arkansas nuns were excommunicated for heresy (the first in the diocese's 165-year history). They refused to recant the doctrines of the Community of the Lady of All
Nations (Army of Mary). The 6 nuns are members of the Good Shepherd Monastery of Our Lady of Charity and Refuge in Hot Springs. Sister Mary Theresa Dionne, 82, one of 6, said they will still live at the convent property, which they own. The sect believe that its 86-year-old founder, Marie Paule Giguere, is the reincarnation of the Virgin Mary.[9]

Selected quotations

- James G. March on the relation between madness, heresy, and genius: "... we sometimes find that such heresies have been the foundation for bold and necessary change, but heresy is usually just new ideas that are foolish or dangerous and appropriately rejected or ignored. So while it may be true that great geniuses are usually heretics, heretics are rarely great geniuses."[10]

- Isaac Asimov distinguished between two types of scientific heretic: "Endoheretics are appropriately credentialed scientists. If the person is outside the scientific community or at least outside of his specialty, he is an exoheretic. If a person is an endoheretic, he will be considered as eccentric and incompetent, whereas if the person is an exoheretic, he will be regarded as a crackpot, charlatan, or fraud."

References

1. ^ Oxford English Dictionary
2. ^ The Limits of Orthodox Theology: Maimonides' Thirteen Principles Reappraised, by Marc B. Shapiro, ISBN 1874774900
3. ^ See Maimonides, and his differentiation between different statuses in Hilchos Teshuvah
4. ^ See Maimonides, and his differentiation between different statuses in Hilchos Teshuvah
5. ^ Sahih al-Bukhari (http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/fundamentals/hadithsunnah/bukhari/049.sbt.html#003.049.861)
6. ^ Sahih Muslim (http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/fundamentals/hadithsunnah/muslim/018.smt.html#018.4266)
7. ^ Qur'an (USC-MSA Compendium of Muslim Texts) (http://www.usc.edu/dept/MSA/qur'an/005.qmt.html#005.003)

See also

- Apostasy
- Binitarianism
- Cherem, a related concept in Judaism
- Christian anarchism
- Christian theological controversy
- Heresy in the 20th century
- Heterodoxy
- History of Christianity
- Infallibility of the Church
- Inquisition
- List of people burned as heretics
- Orthodoxy
- Sabbath Breaking
- Schism
- Status quo
External links

- Some quotes and information in this article came from the Catholic Encyclopedia (http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07256b.htm).
- De Fide (http://www.defide.com), a non-profit association which uses Canon Law to defend the Faith and Church from Heresy, through lawsuits in Ecclesiastical Court.
- (French) Cathars of the middle age (http://www.chemins-cathaeres.eu/05_02_cathaeres_philosophie_histoire.php), Philosophy and History.
- What Is Heresy? by Wilbert R. Gawrisch (http://www.wlsessays.net/authors/G/GaurischHeresy/GaurischHeresy.pdf) (Lutheran)

References

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