

e. A Test Basis

This occurs when the finding is submitted to the analysis of the community by and large. This test basis may be promoted by unfortunate schism or division but it will be there and the action of the community will determine the character of the statement and to a lesser extent, I suppose, the acceptability of the finding.

f. Developed formulation

This is the final expression and it may be presented in the form of a creed, a doctrinal statement, or the opinion of a group or its ministry. Its binding character will depend somewhat on the group that produces it but it will be binding on that group...and in time will have effect on those that are contiguous bodies.

We regularly observe this procedure in occurrence in history. It may not be planned that way but it is what occurs. In this way it not only helps us analyze the why and wherefore of an existing teaching but helps us understand what modus operandi may be involved in our own ministries and doctrinal enrichments.

6. Criteria for Orthodoxy

When a statement is propounded or a teaching given, how do we know that the doctrine is "orthodox" and that it concurs with the truth of the Word and the understanding of the church? In a protestant frame of reference we usually note these items:

a. The concept must satisfy the descriptions and summaries of Scripture. It must be marked with Biblical character and authority.

b. It must stand in agreement with what has previously been gleaned and expounded as being Biblical. It is compatible with doctrine as already perceived.

c. It must hold defensibility within the Christian community. This means it should not be limited in application to one small segment of the church but should find a hearing beyond the immediate community.

The points sketched are not sufficiently specific to solve all doctrinal disputes or to secure general concurrence. They do offer safe working guidelines that will allow enough diversity for health but maintain enough strictness for spiritual honesty. They emphasize the ideal that no man or group can simply create a doctrine nor can a doctrine be refused because it fails to meet the convenience of a special interest segment of the community. The criteria for orthodoxy is much more complicated in Roman and Orthodox circles so...among other things, be glad for the relative simplicity of protestantism.