

Guilt by Association

Heresy Catalogues in Early Christianity

Geoffrey S. Smith



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To Emily
with love

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Introduction

FEW LITERARY INNOVATIONS have exercised as much influence upon Christian attitudes toward internal diversity as has the practice of organizing the names and alleged misdeeds of rival teachers into heresy catalogues. From the blacklists wielded by prominent early Christian authors such as Justin, Irenaeus, Hippolytus, and Epiphanius to Walter Martin's encyclopedic *Kingdom of the Cults*, which since its first printing in 1965 has served as the definitive collection of modern-day heresies for millions of Christians worldwide,¹ followers of Jesus throughout the past two millennia have repeatedly employed the technology of the heresy catalogue as a powerful weapon to be used in internal struggles for legitimacy, authority, and supremacy.

Despite its enduring popularity and influence within the Christian tradition, the heresy catalogue remains an underappreciated polemical genre among historians of early Christianity. Walter Bauer's publication of *Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerei im ältesten Christentum* in 1934 has initiated a crescendo of scholarly interest in orthodoxy and heresy in early Christianity, which has reached full volume with Alain Le Boulluec's 1985 contribution *La notion d'hérésie dans la littérature grecque IIe-IIIe siècles* and the numerous studies that have since appeared. Yet there exists no monograph dedicated solely to the early Christian heresy catalogue as a polemical genre. This lacuna in scholarship is even more surprising in light of the fact that most scholars maintain that the earliest heresiological treatise, that is, the earliest literary attack against so-called heretics, assumed the form of a catalogue rather than a *refutatio*, dialogue, or other known polemical genre. If second-century blacklists gave rise to the broader Christian heresiological

1. For the current edition of this popular work, which has been "completely updated for the 21st century," see W. Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2003).

tradition, then the emergence, use, and legacy of the early Christian heresy catalogue should be a matter of primary interest to historians of early Christianity.

When heresy catalogues do receive scholarly attention, their polemical aspects are often overlooked or dismissed. Rather than study heresy catalogues for what they are, early Christian instruments of self-definition and discredit, scholars usually regard them as archives of historically reliable information that can be used to reconstruct the beliefs and practices of the Simonians, Basilidians, and other sects that would have disappeared from the historical record if not for their mention in heresiological literature. In the crudest instances of this scholarly practice, entries within heresy catalogues concerning figures such as Simon and the Simonians are interpreted as neutral descriptions and used to create biographical, didactic, and ritual profiles of early Christian heretical communities.

Those scholars who do take into consideration the polemical interests of cataloguers, exercise more caution in their use of hostile sources to reconstruct the beliefs and practices of heretical groups. Yet they nonetheless approach heresy catalogues first and foremost as archives that have the potential to yield important historical information about the earliest heresiarchs and their followers. The challenge for these scholars becomes sorting the descriptive material from the polemical; they disregard as un-historical any information that they consider to be contaminated by the polemical interests of the cataloguer.

However, by disregarding the polemical aspects of heresy catalogues, scholars miss the point of this important body of exclusionary literature. Since heresiologists composed catalogues with the express purpose of discrediting their opponents, we should first consider how early Christians made use of these polemical texts. Who used these catalogues and to what end? Which groups were they directed against? How do cataloguers characterize and classify their opponents? And what specific strategies of discredit do they employ? By advocating a greater appreciation for the polemical interests of cataloguers, I am not suggesting that we give up on recovering historically accurate information from heresy catalogues; instead, I am proposing that we rethink the nature of the “historical” information they contain. If heresy catalogues are not first and foremost evidence of the beliefs and practices of heretics, let us consider what they are evidence of: early Christian representations of others in relation to themselves.

In the following chapters, I adopt the working assumption that the chief historical value of heresy catalogues lies not in the kernels of truth

that they may contain about the lives, teachings, and practices of heresiarchs, but in what they reveal about the various ways that early Christians defined themselves over and against their opponents. I focus especially on the earliest Christian heresy catalogues, those found within the works of Justin, Irenaeus, Hegesippus, and the authors the *Testimony of Truth* and the *Tripartite Tractate*, with a special emphasis on the first two. Justin and Irenaeus receive special attention not because, as so-called fathers of the church, they occupy a privileged position in the historical record but because by promoting and making use of a particular heresy catalogue, the *Catalogue* or *Syntagma against All the Heresies*, they popularized one specific heresiological model at the expense of others.

Though the treatise-length works of later cataloguers such as Hippolytus, Epiphanius, and Pseudo-Tertullian also merit careful study, I focus primarily upon the earliest catalogues because, as I argue, it is during this formative period that many of the conventions adopted by later cataloguers were established. Hippolytus, Epiphanius, and Pseudo-Tertullian are heirs to the cataloguing conventions that Justin and Irenaeus popularized.

This study not only contributes to our understanding of the origins of the Christian heresiological tradition. By studying the emergence, use, and legacy of the earliest heresy catalogues, we also gain new insights into the complex process through which early Christianity took shape. Followers of Jesus interested in breaking from Judaism turned to heresy catalogues for help; they sought to drive a wedge between themselves and their non-messianic opponents by listing them among the heretics. Likewise, philosophically minded Christians in fear of being mistaken for philosophers employed blacklists to help distance themselves from their pagan rivals. Heresy catalogues also aided in the establishment of rhetorically constructed groups of opponents. Irenaeus, for example, gives the impression that his diverse array of opponents comprises a coherent and like-minded group when he refers to the heresiarchs named in a particular heresy catalogue as a single “Gnostic school.” Thus, our study of early Christian blacklists not only examines the dynamic of orthodoxy and heresy in early Christianity, it also offers glimpses into Christianity’s complicated and ever-changing relationship with Judaism and pagan philosophy and explores the origins and nature of ancient Gnosticism.

In chapter 1, I take up the question of the origins of the early Christian heresy catalogue. If the earliest followers of Jesus did not make use of this polemical genre, where then did it come from? Scholars often point to the Greek doxographic or “tenet writing” tradition as the literary forerunner

of the Christian heresy catalogue. Yet I argue that although heresy catalogues resemble lists of philosophers and philosophical views in form, they function quite differently. Therefore, I direct our attention away from doxographies, to an earlier group of Christian writings composed in the name of the apostle Paul. The anonymous authors who produced texts like the Pastoral Epistles, the *Epistle to the Laodiceans*, and the *Apocryphal Correspondence between Paul and the Corinthians* initiated important shifts in the ways that Christians conceived of their opponents and thus paved the way for the introduction of the heresy catalogue a generation later.

In chapter 2, I revisit a topic that has received much attention in scholarship: Justin's role in the emergence of the cataloguing tradition. Since Justin is traditionally thought to have authored the earliest known heresy catalogue, the *Syntagma against All the Heresies*, he is credited with the "invention" of heresiology. In this chapter, however, I reevaluate Justin's status as the founder of heresiology by arguing that he likely did not compose the *Syntagma against All the Heresies*. When he mentions the treatise in *1Apology* 26, he uses the language of advertisement, not of authorship. Despite the likelihood that Justin did not compose this earliest known heresy catalogue, he nonetheless plays an important role in the early heresiological tradition by promoting the treatise and making it available to a wide audience. Justin may not be the progenitor of the Christian heresiological tradition, but he certainly lent stability to it by popularizing one particular catalogue over and above others.

Chapter 3 explores the implications of the argument in the previous chapter. If Justin did not compose the *Syntagma* but in fact felt compelled to advertise it as *the* authoritative heresy catalogue, then other catalogues containing alternative approaches to heresy likely circulated alongside the *Syntagma*. In this chapter, I survey texts that may reflect some of the competing approaches to heresy current at the time of Justin by analyzing catalogues that appear in the writings of Hegesippus, elsewhere in Justin, the *Tripartite Tractate*, and the *Testimony of Truth*. We find that the approach to heresy in the *Syntagma* was just one of many available early Christian models. In the second and early third centuries many Christians considered the *Syntagma* model, that is, the task of distinguishing "true" Christians from "false" Christians, to be less urgent than that of distancing Christianity from Judaism. Others wanted to ensure that outsiders would not mistake followers of Jesus for pagan philosophers. Thus for many the real heretics were not other Christians, but Jews and pagans. In this formative period of self-definition, there would have been nothing

obvious or commonplace about the approach to heresy found within the *Syntagma against All the Heresies*. The attitude toward heresy in the *Syntagma* represents only one of a variety of ways in which early Christians conceived of their opponents.

In the final chapter, I argue that Irenaeus's incorporation of an updated version of the *Syntagma against All the Heresies* into Book I of his monumental treatise *Against the Heresies* marked a watershed moment in the history of heresiology. Given his influence upon subsequent generations of polemicists, Irenaeus's use of a version of the *Syntagma* as the cornerstone of his own heresiological treatise not only ensured the dominance of this one particular approach to heresy over others; it also led to the creation of the "school called Gnostic," which, I argue, does not refer to an actual historical community but instead serves as a polemical designation imposed upon those heretics named in the updated version of the *Syntagma*.

A close analysis of Irenaeus's use of an updated version of the *Syntagma* in Book I also reveals aspects of his polemic against the Valentinians that scholars have not always noted. To convince his readers that his Valentinian opponents belong not to the church but to the Gnostic school, Irenaeus characterizes them as philosophers and scholastics. By characterizing his opponents in this way, Irenaeus leaves his readers with the impression that his rivals are not members of an ecclesiastical community at all, but teachers and students operating within a philosophical school, who make illegitimate attempts at encroaching upon the territory of the church by making use of her Scriptures. By highlighting this important aspect of Irenaeus's polemic against the Valentinians, I hope to offer a useful corrective to the general tendency in recent scholarship to view the Valentinians as members of a school rather than members of the church.

Doxography, Pseudo-Pauline Literature, and the Christian Heresy Catalogue

IT IS A curious fact that despite the clear Jewish and Greco-Roman underpinnings of much early Christian belief and practice, the technology of the heresy catalogue is without precise parallel in the ancient world.¹ We do on occasion find what might generically be characterized as heresy catalogues in Jewish and pagan writings, such as the famous catalogue of “those who have no share in the life to come” in the Mishnah or the lesser-known list of Christian groups with female leaders found in the writings of Celsus,

1. I find it useful to conceive of the heresy catalogue not simply as a genre but as a literary technology. This shift in terminology highlights the novel aspects of the heresy catalogue. As I will demonstrate below, although the heresy catalogue became popular in the second and third centuries, the earliest followers of Jesus show no knowledge of this polemical genre. While early Christian blacklists assume the form of Greek doxographies (i.e., lists of philosophers and philosophical teachings), they serve a very different function. Thus it is reasonable to conclude that the heresy catalogue was the invention of second-century Christians who made use of preexisting literary genres in the creation of a novel kind of text. In addition, the notion of a technology calls to mind Foucault's various techniques or technologies of power. Power plays an important role in the creation and use of heresy catalogues. By means of the many strategies of discredit that coalesce in heresy catalogues—the act of naming one's opponents, associating them with other named groups, and putting forth selective representations of their lives, teachings, and ritual practices—cataloguers attempt to define and manage their opponents and thus exercise power over them. However, by using the term “technology,” I do not intend to signal my complete dependence upon Foucault. His analysis of technologies of power often focuses on the role that institutions like the penal system play in creating subjects. Yet one is hard-pressed to find a second-century Christian institution that is able to enact and enforce these kinds of individual transformations.

the philosopher and outspoken critic of the Christian movement.² However, these Jewish and pagan lists postdate the earliest Christian lists and may even evince the influence of an established Christian cataloguing tradition upon later non-Christians.³ So where did the heresy catalogue come from? What prior literary efforts gave rise to this effective instrument of self-definition?

Scholars traditionally characterize the Christian heresy catalogue as an adaptation of the Greek doxographic or “tenet writing” tradition, in which students of philosophy would draw up lists of noteworthy philosophers and their teachings. However, in this chapter I argue that though Christian heresy catalogues resemble doxographic lists, they function very differently. If we want to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the literary genres that gave rise to the early Christian heresy catalogue, we must consider the additional literary context of the pseudo-Pauline epistles, a loosely affiliated group of polemical letters written in the name of the apostle Paul that circulated in the first half of the second century.

Though Paul’s name appears on these epistles, it is not the persona of the historical apostle that gives shape to their contents but the persona of a prophetic and polemical Paul whom we also encounter in the Acts of the Apostles.⁴ Facing certain imprisonment and suffering upon his return to Jerusalem, Paul stops in Asia Minor and summons a group of local church leaders. He issues forth a farewell discourse and urges them to

2. Mishnah Sanhedrin 10. Celsus (*apud* Origen) reports: “Certain Simonians exist who worship Helen, or Helenus, as their teacher, and are called Helenians, certain Marcellians, so called from Marcellina, and Harpocratians from Salome, and others who derive their name from Mary, and others again from Martha. . . .” Origen, *Contra Celsum* V.62.

3. Though the Mishnah contains many early traditions, scholars generally agree that it was compiled no earlier than ca. 200 CE. For a discussion of the critical issues involved in dating the Mishnah, see H. L. Strack and G. Stemberger, *Einleitung in Talmud und Midrasch*. (Auflage 9; Munich: C. H. Beck, 2011), 123–66. Celsus likely wrote his treatise *On the True Doctrine* sometime in the last quarter of the second century. See Theodor Keim, *Celsus’ Wahres Wort* (Zurich: Orell, Füssli, 1873). For a concise summary of the conflicting historical evidence for Celsus’s dates, see Joseph Hoffmann, *Celsus on the True Doctrine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 30–33. The earliest datable Christian heresy catalogue, the *Syntagma against All the Heresies*, mentioned and paraphrased by Justin (1*Apology* 26, quoted below), was composed sometime before 150 CE, and, as I argue in the following chapter, just because the *Syntagma* is the earliest datable heresy catalogue does not mean that we should assume that it was the *first* heresy catalogue ever composed. The *Syntagma* likely circulated alongside many other heresy catalogues in the middle of the second century.

4. The transformation of the apostle Paul into an eschatological prophet is part of a broader renewal of interest in apocalypticism among late-first- and early-second-century Christians. For more on the literature produced during this period, see Helmut Koester, *History and Literature of Early Christianity* (vol. 2; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2000), 247–66.

Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers (*episkopoi*), to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son. 29 I know that after I have gone, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. 30 Some even from your own group will come distorting the truth in order to entice the disciples to follow them. 31 Therefore be alert. . . .⁵

These are the words not of the historical Paul but of Paul the prophetic polemicist, who foresees the rise of false teachers in the coming days and urges ecclesiastical leaders to be on guard.⁶ This is the Paul of the pseudo-Pauline letters, and it is by means of the persona of this reimagined Paul that the authors of this collection of pseudepigraphic letters initiated important reconfigurations in the ways that Christians conceived of their opponents. Appeals to the persona of a prophetic and polemical Paul by later polemicists such as Justin, Irenaeus, and others leave little doubt that authors writing in the name of Paul paved the way for the emergence of the heresy catalogue a generation later.⁷ With respect to cataloguers whose

5. Acts 20:28–31a. All New Testament translations are from the NRSV unless otherwise noted.

6. For the transformation of the figure of Paul in early Christian literature, see E. Aleith, *Paulusverständnis in der alten Kirche* (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1937); M. Howe, “Interpretations of Paul in the Acts of Paul and Thecla,” in *Pauline Studies* (eds. D. A. Hagner and M. J. Harris; Exeter, UK: Paternoster Press, 1980), 33–49; O. Knoch, *Die “Testamente” des Petrus und Paulus: Die Sicherung der apostolischen Überlieferung in der spätneutestamentlichen Zeit* (Stuttgart: KBW Verlag, 1973); A. Lindemann, *Paulus im ältesten Christentum: Das Bild des Apostels und die Rezeption der paulinischen Theologie in der frühchristlichen Literatur bis Marcion* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1979); D. R. MacDonald, *The Legend and the Apostle: The Battle for Paul in Story and Canon* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983); E. Pagels, *The Gnostic Paul: Gnostic Exegesis of the Pauline Letters* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1975); R. Pervo, *The Making of Paul: Constructions of the Apostle in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010); see also Pervo’s extensive bibliography; D. Rensberger, “As the Apostle Teaches: The Development of the Use of Paul’s Letters in Second-Century Christianity” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Yale University, 1981); and P. Trummer, *Die Paulustradition der Pastoralbriefe* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang Verlag, 1978).

7. The influence of pseudo Paul on Irenaeus is clear already in his allusion to 1 Tim 6:20 in the title of his heresiological treatise *Refutation and Overthrow of Knowledge Falsely So-Called* (Ἐλεγχος καὶ ἀνατροπὴ τῆς ψευδωνύμου γνώσεως) and in his dependence upon the Pastorals throughout. See B. White, “How to Read a Book: Irenaeus and the Pastoral Epistles Reconsidered,” VC 65(2011): 125–49; and Rolf Noormann, *Irenäus als Paulusinterpret: Zur Rezeption und Wirkung der paulinischen und deuteropaulinischen Briefe im Werk des Irenäus von Lyon* (WUNT 2.66; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994). Justin’s dependence upon a reimagined Paul is less conspicuous. Just prior to introducing a heresy catalogue in *Dialogue* 35, Justin indicates that he is familiar with Paul the eschatological prophet when he embeds a version of 1 Cor 11:18, 19 into a series of Matthean prophetic pronouncements of Jesus: “Indeed

dependence upon a polemical Paul cannot be demonstrated, this study serves as but one example of the kinds of reconfigurations in Christian polemical culture that took place in the second century that likely found their way to other cataloguers by means of alternative avenues.

In what follows, I will first introduce the early Christian heresy catalogue in its many manifestations and then explore some problems that we encounter when trying to understand the heresy catalogue exclusively in terms of lists of philosophers and their teachings. Finally, I will direct our attention to polemical letters written in Paul's name and discuss three of the most important features of this body of literature that contributed to the sudden spike in interest in heresy catalogues among a later generation of Christians: (i) the creation of the *heterodidaskalos* or "teacher of other things" as a pressing threat to the integrity of the church; (ii) the construction of a pedagogical relationship between the *heterodidaskaloi* of Paul's generation and future generations of apostates, which served as a first step toward the genealogical scheme of classification preferred by many later cataloguers; and (iii) the call for trustworthy ecclesiastical officials to protect the church by acting as "guardians of the inheritance."

The Early Christian Heresy Catalogue

Heresy catalogues were particularly popular among second-, third-, and fourth-century Christian authors. They appear and reappear in extant literature from this period and assume many forms. Early Christian cataloguers composed lists of various lengths, made use of multiple organizational logics, and advocated their own understanding of Christian truth. The earliest datable heresy catalogue is mentioned by title and paraphrased

he said, *Many will come in my name* (Matt 24:5), *outwardly clothed in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are savage wolves* (cf. Matt 7:15). And *There will be schisms and heresies* (cf. 1 Cor 11:18, 19). And *Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are savage wolves* (cf. Matt 7:15). And *Many false Christs and false apostles will arise, and they will deceive many of the faithful* (cf. Matt 24:11, 24)." Justin apparently considered the apostle Paul and the apocalyptic Jesus to speak with the same prophetic spirit. On this difficult passage, see A. Le Boulluec, "Remarques à propos du problème de 1 Cor. 11,19 et du "logion" de Justin, Dialogue 35," *Studia Patristica* 12(1975): 328–33. Like Justin, other ancient polemicists also appealed to Jesus' prophetic predictions about the future rise of false teachers. See *Didache* 16; *Epistle of the Apostles* 29; *Melchizedek* 5.2–11 (B. Pearson, "Anti-Heretical Warnings in Codex IX from Nag Hammadi" in *Gnosticism, Judaism, and Egyptian Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 184–88). For the early reception of the Pastoral Epistles, especially among polemicists, see Carsten Looks, *Das Anvertraute bewahren: Die Rezeption der Pastoralbriefe im 2. Jahrhundert* (Munich: Herbert Utz Verlag, 1999).

in the *First Apology* (here after *1Apology*) of Justin Martyr, a Christian philosopher and teacher who migrated to Rome from Palestine sometime in the first half of the second century. In *1Apology* 26.8, Justin mentions a “Syntagma” or “Catalogue against All the Heresies” and offers a preview of its contents:

Simon, a certain Samaritan from a village called Gitthon, who, in the time of Claudius Caesar, through the craft of demons who acted through him, because he wielded magical powers in your royal city of Rome, was thought to be a god and was honored as a god by you with a statue. This statue was erected in the Tiber river between the two bridges with this Latin inscription: “To Simon the Holy God.” Indeed, nearly all Samaritans and also many from other nations worship him as the first god and confess him even now. There is also a certain Helen, who traveled around with him at that time, who earlier had been placed in a brothel in Tyre of Phoenicia, whom they call the first thought which came into being from him. And we know a certain Menander, also a Samaritan, from the village of Kapparetaia, who was a disciple of Simon also acted upon by demons, who in Antioch deceived many through magical craft. He also persuaded his followers that they would never die. Even now some of his followers who confess this are still around. And there is a certain Marcion from Pontus, who even now still is teaching those he can persuade to consider something else greater than the creator God. And with respect to every race of man, through the seizing of demons, he has persuaded many to speak blasphemies, and he has made them to deny God, the maker of the entirety and to confess something else beyond him as greater.⁸

Since we can assign Justin’s *1Apology* with reasonable certainty to ca. 150 CE, we know that this catalogue was composed sometime before the middle of the second century.⁹ Justin’s paraphrase of a small section from a larger heresy catalogue illustrates well the various lengths that heresy catalogues

8. *1Apology* 26.2–5.

9. In *1Apology* 46.1 Justin indicates that he is writing 150 years after the birth of Jesus. Harnack took this reference to be approximate and offered a range of 147–54 CE for the composition of the *Apology*. See Harnack, *Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur bis Eusebius*: Theil 2, Band 1, *Chronologie der Literature bis Irenaeus* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1897), 227.