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*Reformation*  
& **REVIVAL**  
**JOURNAL**

ORTHODOXY

*A Quarterly for Church Leadership*

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# REFORMATION & REVIVAL JOURNAL

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1. To encourage *reformation* in local Christian churches worldwide.
2. To promote the cause of *revival* and spiritual awakening through prayer and the provision of resources to aid Christian leaders.

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The conviction of the staff and editors of the *Reformation & Revival Journal* is that awakening, of the kind seen in the First Great Awakening in America, wedded to the doctrinal concerns of the historic Protestant Reformation as expressed in the terms *sola scriptura*, *sola gratia*, and *sola fide*, is needed in our generation.

The views expressed in this publication should be considered as the personal opinions of the authors and are not to be taken as an official editorial perspective.

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# ORTHODOXY

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## INTRODUCTION



*John H. Armstrong*

The idea of orthodoxy has fallen on hard times since the middle of the last century, at least in the West. Modernism, and now postmodernism, have had a strangle hold on the faith of many prompting them to believe that orthodoxy is irrelevant, if not outright preposterous. Who really cares? What matters, many evangelicals now insist, is that you know Jesus. But a generation that doesn't care about orthodoxy is a generation destined to soon lose the vibrant truth of life in Christ.

To be orthodox, in a religious sense, means to hold to right doctrine. The word has generally been used to express the opposite of heresy, a word rarely heard today except in intramural evangelical "food fights" that miss the meaning of the word. The word *ortho* means "straight, right or correct." Joined with the word *doxi* the word conveys the idea of a *correct praise* (worship) or of *sound doctrine*. Though the word does not occur in the Bible, the concept is clearly revealed in the Pauline epistles (cf. Titus 1:9, 13; 1 Timothy 1:3; 2 Timothy 1:13).

The idea behind the word, in its earliest Christian use, was that a person who departed from orthodoxy was someone who held a private, original, or independent view that threatened the health of the Christian Church in its catholicity. The

heretic was the divisive person who insisted on his own opinion over the received historic faith of the whole Church.

The historic church soon realized that heretics who affirmed they were faithful to the Bible could be found everywhere. For this reason creeds were written to give the Church a clear and defined sense of the core of its faith. Departure from the early ecumenical creeds, especially the Apostles Creed and the Nicene Creed, was seen as constituting a departure from orthodoxy.

Since the Church is a living real fellowship of people, it is not surprising that orthodoxy grew in importance over the centuries. In time the word came to mean something akin to the general belief of Christendom. When the Reformers called the Church back to the Scriptures they did not do so in a vacuum. They believed the early patristic writers were closest to the core of Christian faith as expressed in the Bible and sought to apply the purity of this age to the Church again. The results, as everyone knows, was a splintered Church. Following the Reformation we now have terms like "Lutheran orthodoxy," "Reformed orthodoxy," and "Catholic orthodoxy." And the result of this became the modern ("Enlightenment" driven) opposition to orthodoxy, understood in its original sense. Critical theories of the Bible, joined with the scientific approach to exegesis adopted by many foundationalist evangelicals, combined to make the whole scene confusing. The result, even among many conservative Christians, is that orthodoxy has little practical meaning in our time. If there is to be reformation worth the energy of Church leaders together they need to once again wrestle with the whole idea of orthodoxy and its importance to life.