MARCION

Possible Progenitor of Three Famous Christian Communities:
Baptists, Catholics, Gnostics

by Ray Embry 2001

Marcion's place in the history of Christianity is still not very well known. Over the last two hundred years, there have been a growing number of studies that have managed to shed more light on Christianity's first two centuries. Significant breakthroughs have been achieved through means of manuscript discoveries and critical reassessments of some strong traditions. One such orthodox claim that has lost support among many researchers is the once dominant tradition that describes Catholicism as the oldest form of Christianity (Walter Bauer. *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity*).

In the Twentieth Century, the emergence of some significant studies on Marcion has led a variety of Christian thinkers to describe Marcion as the initiator of some important customs and features now found in our modern Christian Faith. Here is a brief list of five things described on the Web as being created by Marcion:

1. The "faith only" movement (solafideism),
2. The theory of dispensationalism,
3. The concept of "New Testament Christianity,"
4. The New Testament itself, as a distinct body of inspired writings,
5. Sola Scriptura, the idea that all Christian teachings should be based solely on the Scriptures (The New Testament).

There are at least eight notable reactions to Marcion that indirectly may be attributed to his early work and mission. After he evangelized the Roman Empire in the Second Century, there began to surface several energetic responses to Marcion's work:

1. The Orthodox began to expand his New Testament,
2. Such ideas as Church Tradition, the Rule of Faith and Apostolic Succession were introduced in order to undermine Marcion's insistence on sola scriptura. These formulations helped crystallize the concept of Orthodoxy (or Catholicism).
3. After Marcion commenced his evangelistic crusade, a significant portion of Christian literature became devoted to apologetics (or polemical defenses) of Orthodoxy (correct doctrines).
4. Forgeries of Christian semi-scriptures mushroomed. Some of these pseudepigrapha (false writings) were composed to counteract some aspect of Marcion's theology.
5. The *Apostles' Creed* is generally recognized as a forgery. Some scholars, such as Arthur C. McGiffert, recognize it as composed specially to temper Marcion's theism.
6. Even the extra-Biblical and incomprehensible word "Trinity" may be seen as a useful device invented to help fend off Marcionite logic.
7. The Inquisition was originally designed as a mechanism to deal with the dualistic Albigensians who had taken up some of Marcion's ideas.
8. The Rosary, according to Catholic Tradition, was also originally designed as an instrument to aid in the battle against Albigensians.

The following article focuses on an early time in Marcion's teaching career, and it brings to light some aspects of that crucial setting. Marcion enters the scene while a battle was waging for the soul of Christianity. There was a tendency then to see Christianity mainly as a New Israel, and Monotheism was then being put forth as the number one teaching of the Church (Note Clement of Rome's long glorification of the Creator, AD 90).

Marcion was attempting to bring Christianity back to its real roots in Jesus Christ. According to Marcion, faith in our Savior led to the real birth of the family of Christians. Traveling across the ancient world, Marcion spread his message of faith. His great success was due to a number of factors. His personal dynamism may have been important. The staying power of his influence was due in large part to the New Testament that he published. The logic of his thinking was persuasive. His ability to answer the problem of evil made him rise head and shoulders above all philosophers and metaphysicians.

THE GNOSTICS

According to Clement of Alexandria, Marcion preceded in time all the great Gnostic masters: "those that invented the heresies" (*The Miscellanies,* Book 7, ch. 17. 106f.). That educated scholar from Alexandria (Clement) represents Marcion as an "elder" predecessor to two early Gnostic teachers, Valentinus and Basilides. Another heresiarch, Simon Magus, who is often portrayed as the grand father of Gnosticism, also is described by Clement as succeeding Marcion. "This statement of Clement appears to make Marcion an old man while (Basilides and) Valentinus were still young, and to put Simon Magus posterior to them all in time" (Robert Smith Wilson. *Marcion: A Study of a Second-Century Heretic.* James Clarke & Co. Ltd. 1932. p. 56). Clement's chronological data is not being so readily dismissed today, and Marcion's career is being dated to an earlier time than before (*Marcion: On the Restitution of Christianity - An Essay on the Development of Radical Paulinist Theology in the Second Century*. R. Joseph Hoffmann. Scholars Press 1984).

Besides this historical evidence about his priority, Marcion's simple Dualism seems to be the logical antecedent or background for the complex arrangements found in Gnosticism. Indeed, Gnostics are often mistakenly described as Dualists. More correctly, the Gnostic method is essentially an imaginative attempt to give a monotheistic explanation about the rise of evil. (Gnostics seem to be direct heirs of Jewish speculative theology where there was a keen interest in angelology and Logos theories. The Gnostic aethereal matrix was mobilized to counteract the growing influence of Marcion's Antithesis. The Orthodox were less disturbed over the Gnostics than they were over Marcion.) The Gnostics believed they had adequately explained how darkness and corruption could ultimately descend from a singular source of Divine Light.

Between that Perfect Light and our imperfect world, there are (according to the Gnostics) a significant number of stations, events and beings that tend to absorb the attribution of evil away from the highest level of Divine Unity. The various lists of intermediaries found in Gnostic literature identify a number of individuals that seem to be responsible for all the strife and confusion that is so evident in this lower realm. Thus the Highest Cause remains ineffable and unsullied. The Gnostic quest is to return to that great level of Divine Integrity.

Marcion's simple Dualism was not adopted wholesale by any Gnostic system (unless Cerdo was a real Gnostic). All Gnostic theories eventually envision a single source for everything. Sometimes this original point seems to be bipolar and sometimes it is bisected along sexual lines. Even this binary entity acts corporately for the birth or incipience of all else.

All Gnostic theologies seemingly spring forth as ideological children born from the ancient Mosaic idea about an inviolable monotheism. This form of theism sees everything (no matter what) as ultimately deriving from a single Creator. Working within this rigid model of monism, the Yahudaistic or Mosaic theoreticians could only think in a linear or vertical fashion, where our world lies on one end, while an independent Father of Light stands on the other.

The new Gnostic systems describe every single thing as somehow related, but, due to Marcion's contention, evil is removed as far as possible down the ladder. These semi-Marcionite schemes all attempt to place evil far, far away from the Supreme Being. They make evil seem hardly related to the Most High Entity. In their effort to rebut Marcion's recognition of an independent kingdom of evil, the Gnostics preferred to describe the evil world as an accident or as a disturbance caused by a lack of knowledge. Evil, to the Gnostic, was mostly described as a mixing with Matter which in turn was able to interfere with man's clearness or pureness of vision.

Whenever a sufficient distance is achieved away from the Ultimate Source for Light, then this detached condition seems almost fated to bring about a measure of darkness. By not being directly responsible for an unenlightened world, the Gnostic God of Light and Wisdom was superficially made to resemble Marcion's. However, the Gnostic's ingenious image of divine supremacy was described more in terms of philosophical majesty or profundity. Originally, Marcion's God was known always as the highest example of moral character and civility.

The later Church Fathers loved to describe Marcion as a Gnostic. They could make this allegation effective only at a time when Gnosticism was clearly waning. The original distinction between Marcion and the Gnostics is easily discoverable when the matter of the Christian canon is carefully examined.

Marcion was a man who determined all by the canon (sola scriptura). He did not rely on secret visitations or mysterious documents in order to validate his teaching. He relied solely on the plain message of the Gospels and the Epistles of Paul.

Departing dramatically from Marcion's simple reliance on writing, the Gnostics felt no compunction whatsoever about writing down their wild imaginations. They all felt totally justified in this because their holy campaign was looked on by them as a necessary defense of Hebrew monotheism. Many Gnostics alluded to the existence of Jesus, and when they made some such a reference, they usually portrayed him as a brilliant Messenger who had been sent to point a way for man to pass back through the great cosmic confusion. A shadow had materialized throughout our world and it managed to obscure mankind's appreciation of pure monotheism.

The Gnostics were generally a scholarly community who tossed around their knowledge of ancient history and traditions. They gleaned much from their library of classics and they mixed legendary and scriptural matters freely. They had pride in mental eccentricity and they gloried in their metaphysical erudition. Their key to the future was their mind's ability to hold onto the secrets of life. Their crowning jewel was their apparent ability to solve Marcion's dilemma without having to abandon monotheism.

Marcion's use of the Christian canon brings him closer to the Scripture-oriented Christianity of the great Councils than it does to the myth-oriented Gnostics. Marcion sponsored an open Christianity that met in churches. The Gnostic affinity or group identity was a secret bond that transcended the local "Christian" congregations. Marcion preached the Gospel to all, while the Gnostics gloried in their elite status by carefully guarding the deepest of their inspired secrets.

Again, the similarity between Marcion and the Gnostics is only superficial. The similarity actually only involves a common vocabulary of a few key words. When the respective usage of these words is taken into consideration, a vast difference slowly emerges. Marcion had a practical and ethical interest. The Gnostic interest was philosophical and argumentative. A Gnostic group could be libertine in its practice, and still it could be recognized as fundamentally faithful to the principles of Gnosticism. Marcion's principles always required the highest degree of morality.

Love, for the Gnostics, was generally only their conscious desire to return to the Highest Heaven, in company with their friends. Marcion recognized Christ's great mission as a journey of compassion to this lost world. Loving our enemies is the heart of this Gospel.

THE ORIGIN OF THE WORD "CHRISTIAN"

The historical records about Marcion's contact with Gnostics is very meager. Accepting Marcion's priority makes sense out of the otherwise mysterious origins of Gnosticism. A more recent review of Marcion's chronology places the beginning of Marcion's ministry several years before that of the supposed "Gnostic" Cerdo. Cerdo (or Cerdon) apparently flourished as a teacher after AD 130, "in the time of Hyginus, who was the eighth bishop" (Robert Smith Wilson. *Marcion: A Study of a Second Century Heretic.* James Clarke & Co. Ltd. 1932. p.54; quoting Irenaeus. *Adv. Haer.* III.4.53). Hyginus superintended the Roman Ecclesia AD 136-140.

According to a reasonable interpretation of the chronological evidence, Polycarp (while a bishop of Smyrna) was writing in AD 115 about the extensiveness of Marcion's teachings in Asia Minor (*Pol. Phil.* 2:18,19). Polycarp styled Marcion as "the first-born of Satan" (*Ante-Nicene Fathers [ANF]* vol. 1, p. 416), and the object of Polycarp's criticism in his Epistle to Philippi is directed to this same "[son]."

About the year AD 138, Justin Martyr (a resident of Rome) wrote about Marcion's unusually long and effective teaching career. "And there is Marcion, a man of Pontus, who is even at this day alive, and teaching his disciples to believe in some other god greater than the Creator. And he, by the aid of devils, has caused many of every nation to speak blasphemies, and to deny that God is the maker of this universe, and to assert that some other being, greater than He, has done greater works. All who take these opinions from these men are, as we before said, called Christian" (Justin's [First] *Apology.* I.26. *ANF.* vol. 1. p. 171). The reason for dating this statement to the year AD 138 is discoverable in Blackman's study (*Marcion and His Influence.* p. 21).

One of the most startling things in Justin's unfavorable review of Marcion is the surprising appearance of the word "Christians" as a commonly used title to describe the members of Marcionite churches. By AD 138, Marcionites could be found in "every nation." At this early time, there is some confusion about the correct spelling for "Christian." It is known that Marcion preferred to call Jesus the "Chrestos" (which means the Kind or Helpful One). "… [T]he spelling for 'Chrestos' (=the Good *one*) [is] derived from an ancient inscription to a Marcionite synagogue"

(Daniel Jon Mahar. *English Reconstruction and Translation of Marcion's version of To The Galatians.* p. 1).

Those 'orthodox' believers who were more allied with the Roman Ecclesia were already at this time proudly bearing the title "Catholic." By the time when *The Acts of the Apostles* was formally published about the middle of the Second Century, the word "Christian" had become very popular as a designation for believers in Jesus. Because of this, there was needed some kind of explanation about its origin.

Not many know that the Sinaiticus manuscript has a peculiar way of spelling the word Christian. Everywhere this title appears, that Fourth Century manuscript spells it "Chrestian." Vaticanus, a manuscript of the same age, utilizes a slightly transitional spelling: "Chreistian."

This surely is strong evidence about Marcion's real role. Not only is Marcion's original spelling for "Christian" still evident in such important manuscripts, this also indicates directly the strength and extent of Marcionite effects on the entire Christian community, including its scholars. There is still some bifurcation between the words "Catholic" and "Christian" today.

In AD 49, Rome experienced disturbances in the Yahudi community that had been provoked by the preaching of "Chrestus" (based on the account of Suetonius in J. Steven's *New Eusebius.* no. 2, p. 1). "[Aquila] and his wife Priscilla had recently left Italy because an edict of Claudius had expelled all the Jews from Rome" (Acts 18:2, Jerusalem Bible). It seems notable at this time (AD 49) that "Yahudim" in general were expelled, and not simply followers of "Chrestus" or "Chrestians." "Was it because at this early date the Roman authorities did not or could not clearly differentiate between the Christians and the "Yahudim?" (Wilson. *Marcion…* p. 25). The presence of the Gentile title "Chrestus" in Rome implies also the presence of an accompanying Gentile-oriented Gospel. Some Yahudim seem to have loudly voiced a degree of intolerance upon hearing this proclamation of "Chrestus."

In Vaticanus and Sinaiticus it is not possible to discover how Jesus' main title (Christ) was spelled. A scribal device called "nomina sacra" was employed as a emphatic technique to highlight special words. The highlighted words were shortened. Because of this, the scribes left out the main vowel every time. Most Greek editions restore the vowel as an iota ("i").

By making a back formation from the Sinaiticus' "Chrestian," the word "Chrestos" appears as the proper title for Jesus. Through this logical method, it can be reasonably argued that Jesus' normal title should be fully spelled "Chrestos" throughout Sinaiticus.

Besides the two oldest Greek New Testaments from the Fourth Century, and in addition to the oldest dated church inscription (AD 318), there is an abundance of ancient testimony that shows that the title "Chrestus" for Jesus was very popular among "common" Christians.

The two titles "Chrestus" or "Chrestian" are referred to in the following written sources: Tertullian (AD 210), *The Eighth Sibyl* (AD 200), Theophilos of Antioch (AD 170), Marcus (AD 145), *Apocalypse of Elijah* (AD 100), Suetonius (AD 124) and Tacitus (AD 116). There is even a disputed inscription (now lost) from Pompei (AD 79) that is believed to have contained a reference to this lost title of Jesus.

The ruling theologians of orthodoxy denounced the spelling "Chrestus" as based on ignorance. Lactantius (AD 310) said: "The ignorant are accustomed to call Him 'Chrestus'" (*ANF.* Vol. 7, p. 106).

To the simple believers in Jesus, He is Christ, the Good Shepherd, who seeks and saves the lost. To the intellectuals, He is Christ, the just King, who casts the sinner into hell.

As a token of His merciful character, Jesus was once honored with the title "Chrestus" (which means benevolent one). This probably was the original meaning (and spelling) for Jesus' title in the oldest New Testament, the one that Marcion published.

The theological reason for the Orthodox scribes carefully and stealthily introducing "Christ" as Jesus' main title is explainable from its etymology. "Christ" in Greek means "anointed" (or royal). This meaning matches that of the Hebrew word "Messiah." The Church Fathers preferred Jesus to be known as Israel's coming King.

"Paul put Jesus Christ in the forefront of his preaching, and they ['the early Gentile churches'] can hardly have done otherwise. It is no accident, indeed, that the adherents of the new faith were early called Christians" (Arthur Cushman McGiffert. *The God of the Early Christians.* p. 44).

THE BEGINNING OF CATHOLICISM

Adolf von Harnack represented Marcion as the creator of the Catholic Church. This characterization mainly refers to the Roman ecclesia's response to Marcion's evangelism. The rapid growth of Marcionite churches across the Roman Empire in the first two decades of the Second Century motivated the presbytery of the "great" Roman congregation to form a more comprehensive hierarchy and outreach.

Before this time, Christianity was often viewed as indistinguishable from Yahudaism. Marcion's effort called for a clear distinction. Afterwards, Judeo-Christianity became isolated so that it had to take an independent course. This was predictable because its strong Yahudi anchor made it totally incompatible with Marcion's idea of New Testament Christianity.

"… [O]nly after Marcion did those in the great church begin the purposeful work of deriving from heaven the holy church, … and of combining the congregations here on earth into an actual community and unity on the basis of a fixed doctrine that is rooted in the New Testament, just as Marcion did. This demonstrates that by means of his organizational and theological conceptions and by his activity Marcion gave the decisive impetus towards the creation of the old catholic church and provided the pattern for it" (Adolf von Harnack. *Marcion: The Gospel of the Alien God.* Labyrinth Press 1990 [1924]. p. 131,132).

"… [C]atholicism is constructed as a defense against Marcion…" (ibid p. ix).

The idea of Christian independence from Yahudaism became quickly popular. From this point on, Catholicism grew in many ways. Many additional modifications would be made until much of the simplicity evident in Marcion's day became either obscured or entirely lost. By keeping the law about Yahudi monotheism as its chief doctrine (as is attested in the creeds), Catholicism opened the door to regain various other features borrowed from the religion of the Old Testament. By following the pattern of ancient Israel, Catholicism began to augment its hierarchy, its ritualism and its animosity towards independent thinkers.

BAPTIST HISTORY

There is an even greater affinity between the Marcionite churches and the Baptist churches. Many Baptist historians trace modern Baptist churches back to the Anabaptists of northern Europe, those who were contemporary with Luther (early Sixteenth Century). The Anabaptist phenomenon is often viewed as a revival of the Albigensian churches of the Fourteenth Century.

The Albigensian Dualists flourished in Languedoc (southern France). The Albigensians, along with the Cathari, are in turn traced by some prominent historians back to the Paulicians of the Ninth Century. These Christian Dualists prospered primarily in Armenia. At last, many view the Paulicians as direct (or indirect) heirs to Marcion's Gospel message. Baptist historians conveniently fail to make this last connection.

The analogy between the Marcionites and the Baptists does not end with this probable evidence of historical lineage. The similar character of the churches is more remarkable. They both were a) simple, b) New Testament oriented, c) non-establishment, d) non-sacerdotal, e) non-sacramental, f) evangelistic, g) faithful to sola scriptura, and, h) devoted to Jesus.

On the subject regarding "Marcion's historical position," Adolf von Harnack stated: "It is understandable that Neander could call him {Marcion} the first Protestant. But we may go further. He not only took up again the work and the struggle of Paul, but he also did this in the apostle's understanding and consciousness of faith; for it was his intention to know nothing save Christ the crucified one" (ibid p. 124, 125).

SUMMARY

Prior to Marcion's revival of Paul's theology, Christianity was very much identified with Yahudaism. At that time, the Christian Bible was only the Hebrew Old Testament. After Marcion openly published the first New Testament in Rome (AD 116), there arose four great divisions in Christianity. These groups were denominated: the Gnostics, the Catholics, the Judeo-Christians and the Marcionites.

Before Marcion published the first truly Christian Bible, Christianity already had been divided into two groups. In Paul's words, there were the "Yahudaizers" and there were the Pneumatics (the "Spiritual"). The Yahudaizers were more allied with Peter and James. The Pneumatics upheld Paul's Gospel of freedom.

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From http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Ithaca/3827/marcion.html

Assembly of Yahweh, Cascade Comment:

Unfortunately, neither the Yahudaizers, the Pneumatic, or those clinging to post Babylonian Yahudaism (Judaism) were never to return to the ancient monotheistic theology found in the Hebrew Bible, namely "Yahwism." All of them still remain religious ideologies developed by and for the control by mortal men.

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Marcion: Forgotten Inventor of the New Testament

October 28, 2013

Christianity owes a major debt to a man with no direct connection to Jesus of Nazareth or Paul of Tarsus – a man labeled a heretic by the forerunners of orthodox Christianity. Marcion (c. 95-165 CE) was a shipbuilder, possibly ship owner, from Pontus, a small region in what is now northern Turkey. We know little else about him, except that at some point in his career he joined the Christian community in Rome only to find himself embroiled in debate with the leadership there. Ultimately they were unable to resolve their differences, and the Marcionite community broke from other Jesus followers of that era. It is unknown how separate the communities were in practice, but in some parts of the ancient world Marcionites were called "Christians" while groups with closer ties to Judaism were called "Nazoreans."

Marcion holds a lasting legacy for Christians as the inventor of the New Testament. Jason BeDuhn, author of _The First New Testament: Marcion's Scriptural Canon_, argues that Marcion not only put together the very first Christian canon of scriptures, he gave Christianity very idea of doing so. At the _Early Christianity: Heritage or Heresies?_ Conference in Santa Rosa, California, BeDuhn spoke about the important role Marcion played in shaping Christian identity. This begins with the relationship between Gentiles and Jews in the Roman Empire. "A good contemporary analogy is the interest some modern White Americans have in Native American religion and culture," he said, "A similar thing was going on with Gentile fans of Judaism in the ancient world. They wanted to take on foreign spirituality and practices." However, Jews rebelled multiple times against the Roman Empire in the second century, and Gentile Christian groups fled association with them, taking on new forms in the process.

Marcionites were pesco-vegetarians who embraced pacifism. Women held high leadership roles, at least prominently enough that critics of Marcionites complained about the role women were playing in the movement. They did not believe the god of Jesus was the god of the Jews. They believed the god of the Jews was a creator god that ruled based on judgment and violence, which Marcion argued by appealing to violent texts in the Hebrew scriptures. Marcion saw the god of Jesus as an entirely new being, a higher god who provided escape from the judgment of this world. Most importantly, Marcionites had something no other Christians had: a canon of their own scriptures.

Challenging Traditional Views of Marcion

Critics of Marcion like Tertullian and Epiphanius complained that Marcion cut and edited scripture to fit his beliefs. Biblical scholar Adolf von Harnack accepted this claim in his definitive text on Marcion, _Marcion: The Gospel of an Alien God_ (1920). However, Tertullian and Epiphanius lived several generations after Marcion, and they assumed the New Testament they read already existed in Marcion's era. It didn't. Marcion's critics were reading history backward instead of forward: there was no New Testament yet.

Ancient critics thought Marcion cut out texts he didn't like from an already existing canon, but this is not true.

— Westar Institute (@WestarInstitute) <u>October 24, 2013</u>

When we leave aside these assumptions, we can realize that Marcion's text is a valuable witness to the development of texts

— Westar Institute (@WestarInstitute) <u>October 24, 2013</u>

We tend to assume the version of Christianity we see today as inevitable, but actually there were many possible ways for Christianity to develop. Christianity may never have become a religion with a set of scriptures at all. Christians may have continued to interpret and reinterpret Hebrew scriptures rely on oral storytelling, consider themselves Yahudi, and so on. The very attitude of Marcionites setting themselves apart from Yahudim led them to declare a "new" testament, and that has made all the difference.

Marcion's New Testament

What did Marcion's version of the New Testament look like? It had two parts: the Evangelion, which was a gospel related to the Gospel of Luke, and the Apostolikon, a collection of Paul's letters. Marcion is our first witness to six of the ten letters now considered to be authentic by modern biblical scholars. Biblical scholars came to the conclusion that only some letters attributed to Paul are authentic (most exclude 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus, for example). The evidence from Marcion supports this finding. The inclusion of Paul's letters in the New Testament was by no means certain. Rather, Marcion's choice to include the letters succeeded in pushing other communities to do the same thing when they came up with competing canons of scripture, although it took his competitors (Rome) two hundred years to establish the canon now found in Bibles today.

What Marcion did and what the New Testament became, are directly related. He directly affected the form and content of the NT.

— Westar Institute (@WestarInstitute) <u>October 24, 2013</u>

This is a very different way of looking at the Marcionite New Testament, and scholars will need to compare the edition reconstructed by Jason BeDuhn to determine how this changes our view of how early Christianity developed. For example, the Evangelion is much shorter than the Gospel of Luke, and it is not clear whether they were both written by the same person for different communities, or if a later editor added new material to the Gospel of Luke. Also, BeDuhn found that the Marcionite version of Romans 9-11 is completely different, yet this text has been used by some scholars as a key to Pauline theology. Regardless of how these findings eventually play out in scholarly discussion and debates, BeDuhn identifies four significant contributions of Marcion to Christian history:

1. Christians owe the idea of a "new" testament to Marcion.

2. Christians owe to Marcion the particular form of the New Testament.

3. Christians owe to Marcion the prominence of the voice of Paul in the New Testament.

4. Finally<u>, Christians owe to Marcion a Christian identity built on a special scripture all of their own.</u>

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Marcion and the Marcionites

(144 - 3rd century CE)

At the end of July, 144 CE, a hearing took place before the clergy of the Christian congregations in Rome. Marcion, the son of the bishop of Sinope (a sea-port of Pontus along the Black Sea) who had become a wealthy ship-owner, stood before the presbyters to expound his teachings in order to win others to his point of view. For some years he had been a member of one of the Roman churches, and had proved the sincerity of his faith by making relatively large contributions. No doubt he was a respected member of the Christian community.

But what he now expounded to the presbyters was so monstrous that they were utterly shocked! The hearing ended in a harsh rejection of Marcion's views; he was formally excommunicated and his largesse of money was returned. From this time forward Marcion went his own way, energetically propagating a strange kind of Christianity that quickly took root throughout large sections of the Roman Empire and by the end of the 2nd century had become a serious threat to the mainstream Roman Christian Church. In each city of any importance the Marcionites set up their church to defy the Roman Christian one. Although in definite decline in the West from the middle of the 3rd to the 4th centuries, the movement proved more durable in the East, where, after remarkably overcoming the 3rd-century Roman persecutions of the emperors Valerian and Diocletian, it continued to flourish until as late as the 10th century, especially in Syrian culture. A Catholic Encyclopedia article is online at Marcionites.

Marcion wrote only a single work, *Antitheses* (Contradictions), in which he set forth his ideas. Since it has not been preserved, we must be content with deducing its contents from notices contained in the writings of opponents -- particularly in **Tertullian's** 5 volumes written against Marcion - *Adversus Marcionem*. An English translation is available at the **Christian Classics Ethereal Library.** The main points of Marcion's teaching were the rejection of the Old Testament and a distinction between the Supreme God of goodness and an inferior God of justice, who was the Creator and God of the Jews. He regarded Christ as the messenger of the Supreme God.

The Old and New Testaments, Marcion argued, cannot be reconciled to each other. The code of conduct advocated by Moses was 'an eye for an eye', but Christ set this precept aside. Elisha had had children eaten by bears; Christ said, 'Let the little children come to me'. Joshua had stopped the sun in its path in order to continue the slaughter of his enemies; Paul quoted Christ as commanding, 'Let not the sun go down on your wrath'. In the Old Testament divorce was permitted and so was polygamy; but in the New Testament neither is allowed. Moses enforced the Jewish Sabbath and Law; Christ has freed believers from both.

Even within the Old Testament, Marcion found contradictions. God commanded that no work should be done on the Sabbath, yet he told the Israelites to carry the ark around Jericho 7 times on the Sabbath. No graven image was to be made, yet Moses was directed to fashion a bronze serpent. The deity revealed in the Old Testament could not have been omniscient, otherwise he would not have asked, 'Adam where are you?' (Genesis 3:9).

Marcion, therefore, rejected the entire Old Testament. He accepted the following Christian writings in this order:

- Gospel according to Luke
- Galatians
- I Corinthians
- II Corinthians
- Romans
- I Thessalonians
- II Thessalonians
- Ephesians (which Marcion called Laodiceans)
- Colossians
- Philemon
- Philippians

but only after pruning and editorial adjustment. In his opinion the 12 apostles misunderstood the teaching of Christ, and, holding him to be the Messiah of the Jewish God, falsified his words from that standpoint. Passages that Marcion could regard only as Judaizing interpolations, that had been smuggled into the text by biased editors, had to be removed so the authentic text of Gospel and Apostle could once again be available. After these changes, the Gospel according to Luke became the *Evangelicon*, and the 10 Pauline letters, the *Apostolikon*.

Marcion rejected the following Christian writings:

- Gospel according to Matthew
- Gospel according to John

For a summary of Marcion's opinions see the **Cross Reference Table.**

Marcion's canon accelerated the process of fixing the Church's canon, which had already begun in the first half of the 2nd century. It was in opposition to Marcion's criticism that the Church first became fully conscious of its inheritance of apostolic writings. According to [Grant] (p. 126): "Marcion forced more orthodox Christians to examine their own presuppositions and to state more clearly what they already believed".

Marcion and the Gospel according to Luke

Marcion believed there was one true gospel which had been corrupted into many versions. He explained the corruption on the basis of Galatians in which Paul emphasizes that there is only one gospel (1:8-10) and states that false brethren are attempting to turn believers from this gospel (1:6-7).

Of the Gospels that were current among the churches, the only one that Marcion felt he could trust was the Gospel according to Luke. We cannot say with certainty why he had confidence in this

Gospel, but perhaps the reason was that he regarded the author, Luke, as a disciple of Paul and believed him to be more faithful to tradition than the other evangelists. In any case, this was for Marcion *the* Gospel, without identification of its human author -- a deficiency for which <u>Tertullian</u> (*Adv. Marc*. 4.2) castigates Marcion.

Passages that Marcion could regard only as Judaizing interpolations, that had been smuggled into the text by biased editors, had to be removed so the authentic text of Gospel, which he called the *Evangelicon*, could once again be available. With thorough-going heedlessness of the consequences, Marcion undertook to expunge everything from the text of Luke which echoed or otherwise implied a point of contact with the Old Testament. Since Jesus, according to Marcion, had only the appearance of being human, he could not have been born of a woman. Therefore Marcion omitted most of the first 4 chapters of Luke. In the last chapters the omissions are rather more numerous than the first; the resurrection of Jesus is passed over in silence. More examples may be found in <u>[Evans]</u> (pp. 643-6).

Marcion and Galatians

Marcion deemed Galatians the most important of Paul's epistles. He explained the corruption of the true gospel on the basis of Galatians in which Paul states that false brethren are attempting to turn believers from the gospel:

I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel; which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. (Galatians 1:6-7)

and emphasizes that there is only one Gospel:

But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed. (Galatians 1:8-10)

But Marcion removed whatever he judged were interpolations - that is, anything that did not agree with his understanding of what Paul should have written. For example, Galatians 3:16-4:6 was deleted because of its reference to Abraham and its descendants. More examples may be found in <u>[Evans]</u> (pp. 643-6).

Marcion placed Galatians first in his canon of epistles - the *Apostolikon*.

Marcion and the Pauline Epistles

Marcion was convinced that among the early apostolic leaders only Paul understood the significance of Jesus Christ as the messenger of the Supreme God. He accepted as authoritative these 10 Epistles:

- <u>Galatians</u>
- I Corinthians

- II Corinthians

- Romans

- I Thessalonians

- II Thessalonians

- Ephesians (which Marcion called Laodiceans)

- Colossians

- Philemon

- Philippians

which he called the *Apostolikon*. These became for him the source, the guarantee, and the norm of true doctrine.

But Marcion removed whatever he judged were interpolations - that is, anything that did not agree with his understanding of what Paul should have written. Examples may be found in [Evans] (pp. 643-6).

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Cross Reference Table: Writings and Authorities

Each symbol in the large table below corresponds to a specific authority and a specific writing.
The symbols summarize the opinion of the authority about the writing.
If the symbol is blue, select it with the mouse to jump to the evidence.
The symbols have this meaning:

Symbol	Opinion of Authority
√	accepted; true; scriptural; or quoted from very approvingly
√	possible approving quotation or allusion
¥	acceptable, but only with changes
?	dubious; disputed; or useful for inspiration
∷	spurious (in the classification of Eusebius)
×	false; heretical; heterodox; quoted from very disapprovingly
·	not mentioned or quoted from; opinion unknown

	Ig	Po	M	Va	JM	Ir	C	T	MC	O	E	CS	A	D	P	V
Gospel according to Matthew	√	√	×	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Gospel according to Mark	·	√	·	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Gospel according to Luke	√	√	¥	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√	√

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Gospel according to John	·	·	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Acts	✓	✓	✗	·	·	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Romans	✓	✓	✓	✓	·	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
I Corinthians	✓	✓	✓	✓	·	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
II Corinthians	·	✓	✓	✓	·	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Galatians	·	✓	✓	✓	·	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Ephesians	✓	✓	✓	✓	·	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Philippians	·	✓	✓	✓	·	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Colossians	✓	·	✓	✓	·	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
I Thessalonians	✓	✓	✓	·	·	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
II Thessalonians	·	✓	✓	·	·	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
I Timothy	·	✓	✗	·	·	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
II Timothy	·	✓	✗	·	·	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Titus	·	·	✗	·	·	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Philemon	·	·	✓	·	·	·	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	·	✓	✓
Hebrews	·	✓	·	·	·	✓	✓	✓	·	✓	✓?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
James	·	·	·	·	·	✓	·	·	·	?	?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
I Peter	·	✓	·	✓	·	✓	✓	✓	·	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
II Peter	·	·	·	·	·	·	·	·	·	?	?	✓	✓	✓	·	✓
I John	·	✓	·	✓	·	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
II John	·	·	·	·	·	✓	·	✓	·	?	?	✓	✓	✗	·	✓
III John	·	✓	·	·	·	·	·	·	·	?	?	✓	✓	✗	·	✓
Jude	·	·	·	·	·	·	✓	✓	✓	✓	?	✓	✓	✓	·	✓
Revelation of John	·	·	·	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓✗	✓	✓	✓	·	✓
Gospel of Thomas	·	·	·	·	·	·	·	·	·	✗	✗	·	·	·	·	·
Gospel of Truth	·	·	·	✓	·	✗	·	·	·	·	·	·	·	·	·	·
Gospel of the Twelve	·	·	·	·	·	·	·	·	·	✗	·	·	·	·	·	·
Gospel of Peter	·	·	·	·	·	·	·	·	·	?	✗	·	·	·	·	·
Gospel of Basilides	·	·	·	·	·	·	·	·	✗	✗	·	·	·	·	·	·
Gospel of the Egyptians	·	·	·	·	·	·	✓	·	·	✗	·	·	·	·	·	·
Gospel of the Hebrews	·	·	·	·	·	·	✓	·	·	?	✗	·	·	✓	·	·
Gospel of Matthias	·	·	·	·	·	·	·	·	·	✗	✗	·	·	·	·	·
Traditions of Matthias	·	·	·	·	·	·	✓	·	·	·	·	·	·	·	·	·
Preaching of Peter	·	·	·	✓	·	·	✓	·	·	✗	·	·	·	·	·	·
Acts of Andrew	·	·	·	·	·	·	·	·	·	·	✗	·	·	·	·	·
Acts of Paul	·	·	·	·	·	·	·	·	✗	·	?	✗	·	·	·	·
Acts of John	·	·	·	·	·	·	·	·	·	·	✗	·	·	·	·	·

	Ig	Po	M	Va	JM	Ir	C	T	MC	O	E	CS	A	D	P	V
Epistle to the Laodiceans	·	·	·	·	·	·	·	·	?	·	·	·	·	·	·	✓
I Clement	·	·	·	·	·	✓	✓	·	·	?	·	·	·	✓	·	·
Epistle of Barnabas	·	·	·	·	·	·	✓	·	·	?	※	✓	·	✓	·	·
Didache	·	·	·	·	·	·	✓	·	·	?	※	·	?	✓	·	·
Shepherd of Hermas	·	·	·	·	·	✓	✓	?	?	?	※?	✓	?	✓	·	·
Apocalypse of Peter	·	·	·	·	·	·	✓	·	✓	·	※	·	·	·	·	·

Ig	Ignatius	C	Clement	A	Athanasius
Po	Polycarp	T	Tertullian	D	Didymus
M	Marcion	MC	Muratorian Canon	P	Peshitta
V	Valentinus	O	Origen	V	Vulgate
JM	Justin Martyr	E	Eusebius		
Ir	Irenaeus	CS	Codex Sinaiticus		