

*a paper:*

## AGAINST THE MARCION GNOSTIC HERESIES

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PREFACE

The purpose of this paper is to explore the roots of Gnosticism, the contributions made to the formation of this early Christian heresy by Marcion, and its refutation by The Holy Scriptures and The faithful Church.

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## ABSTRACT

The early Christian heresy known as Gnosticism, most systematically enunciated by Marcion, declared that our Lord's Incarnation did not involve a physical Body. This stemmed from the belief that GOD, Who is pre-existent and eternal Spirit, can not come into contact with the impure physical world. Therefore, Marcion and Gnosticism denied that, as Saint John clearly declares in JOHN 1:14, "And The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us..."

The physical world, the gnostics declared, was made by a lesser evil deity – "JEHOVAH" – and therefore rejected all of The Old Testament. Since The Messiah did not have a true physical Body, He must have been only a Divine illusion, and therefore CHRIST did not actually die on The Cross. His seeming passion and death then, must have a meaning other than being a substitutional atonement to redeem the lost from sin and death under The Law.

Marcion and the gnostics supplied the supposed answer: CHRIST came to impart special secret knowledge of salvation to the elect, that their pure spirits could escape their impure physical prisons and – being truly "saved" – their souls could then ascend to GOD in Heaven! But as we shall see, these doctrines are heretical and in direct contradiction to GOD's Word. Against such error the early Church Fathers successfully battled, preserving Christianity in its true and intended form.

## EPIGRAPH

II JOHN 1:7 - "For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that JESUS CHRIST is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist!" [KJV]

## I. INTRODUCTION

Whether or not gnosticism developed within the early Christian Church as a heresy or was an alien pagan and/or Jewish world view and penetrated the early Church from without is not clear. Perhaps it was a mixture of both. Gnosticism was a religion of synchronizing the world religions then in existence. Thus, it amalgamated Greek-Roman philosophy, paganism, Judaism and Christianity together - taking some aspects from each and rejecting others.<sup>1 2 3</sup>

Gnostic doctrine and worship were very common in and during the period of the early Church.<sup>4 5</sup> Indeed, at a time when there was not yet a universal Christian New Testament, people outside of and within The Church were susceptible to the doctrines of gnosticism, which focused on salvation through JESUS CHRIST, ascetic piety and eternal spiritual life in Heaven with GOD.<sup>6 7</sup> Although there can not be said to have been one single uniform gnostic system, Marcion was the first great gnostic “Christian” scholar to codify what he felt should be the Christian New Testament.<sup>8 9 10</sup>

## II. SELECTED COMMON THEMES OF GNOSTICISM

Gnostics believed the true and good GOD was the greater good GOD of the spiritual world in Heaven who sent JESUS CHRIST to rescue man from the lesser evil God of The Jews portrayed in The Old Testament. Gnostics thus rejected The Old Testament. Gnostics believed that the created material world was evil because its creator God - JEHOVAH - was evil and that the heavenly spiritual world was good because it

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<sup>1</sup> 1, Tillich, “A History of Christian Thought,” p 33-37.

<sup>2</sup> 2, Ferguson, “Backgrounds of Early Christianity,” p 307-313.

<sup>3</sup> 3, Segal, “Gnosticism, Ancient and Modern.” Christian Century, Vol. 112, Issue 32, page numbers not clear. November, 1995.

<sup>4</sup> 1, Tillich, “A History of Christian Thought,” p 33-37.

<sup>5</sup> 3, Segal, “Gnosticism, Ancient and Modern.” Christian Century, Vol. 112, Issue 32, page numbers not clear. November, 1995.

<sup>6</sup> 2, Ferguson, “Backgrounds of Early Christianity,” p 307-313.

<sup>7</sup> 4, Bromily, “Historical Theology,” p18,19,36.

<sup>8</sup> 1, Tillich, “A History of Christian Thought,” p 33-37.

<sup>9</sup> 2, Ferguson, “Backgrounds of Early Christianity,” p 307-313.

<sup>10</sup> 5, Miller and Huber, “The Bible – A History – The Making and Impact of The Bible,” p 92,93,96.

was ruled over by the true GOD.<sup>11 12 13 14</sup>

Gnostics held that pieces of the good spiritual world fell to earth, becoming lodged in and trapped within the matter - i.e. bodies - of some human beings. Liberation of the spiritual soul from this material prison required seeing one's own divinity and up trapping the soul so that it could ascend to reunite with the spiritual world of the true GOD after death.<sup>15</sup>

Gnosticism was essentially elitist, in that it held that only a limited number of men held the spiritual spark fallen from heaven within them that had the potential to be liberated. Rejecting all matter as evil, most gnostics held some degree of rejection of things considered worldly - often holding sexual relations with severe contempt. Gnosticism thus often resulted in a very aesthetic and moralistic lifestyle.<sup>16</sup>

The key to liberation of the soul from the body in gnosticism was spiritual "secret knowledge" for salvation known only to the initiated.<sup>17</sup> This gnostic salvation knowledge was revealed to The Apostles by the messenger of the true spiritual GOD - JESUS CHRIST.<sup>18 19</sup> Thus, gnostic salvation is release from spiritual ignorance and not from the consequences of sinning against GOD.<sup>20</sup>

JESUS CHRIST is but one of many heavenly spiritual powers called "eons." Highest "eon" - JESUS CHRIST - did not take on a human body, but only appeared to do so. This for the purpose of communicating the secret knowledge of salvation to men.

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<sup>11</sup> 1, Tillich, "A History of Christian Thought," p 33-37.

<sup>12</sup> 2, Ferguson, "Backgrounds of Early Christianity," p 307-313.

<sup>13</sup> 3, Segal, "Gnosticism, Ancient and Modern." Christian Century, Vol. 112, Issue 32, page numbers not clear. November, 1995.

<sup>14</sup> 6, Nielson, "Polycarp and Marcion: A Note," Theological Studies, Vol. 47, Issue 2, p 297-299. June, 1986.

<sup>15</sup> 3, Segal, "Gnosticism, Ancient and Modern." Christian Century, Vol. 112, Issue 32, page numbers not clear. November, 1995.

<sup>16</sup> 3, Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> 1, Tillich, "A History of Christian Thought," p 33-37.

<sup>18</sup> 1, Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> 4, Bromily, "Historical Theology," p18,19,36.

JESUS CHRIST, being divine, did not suffer but only appeared to suffer. Thus, there was no birth, death or resurrection.<sup>21 22 23</sup>

The planets are actually demoniac astrological spiritual powers that enslave mankind. Gnostic “secret knowledge” were the seals of power, names and characters of these demoniac gods that - when spoken by the believer - liberated that person from those powers, thus allowing the human soul after death to ascend into Heaven to be with the good and true GOD.<sup>24</sup>

One’s potential for salvation is only open to some of mankind, thus introducing fate: all of the pneumatikoi (the spiritual ones), some of the psychikoi (followers of the soul) and none of the sarkikoi (followers of the flesh).<sup>25 26 27</sup> The Spirit - not of the lesser and evil creator god of this world (JEHOVAH) - but that of the greater and good supreme GOD - only enters the “pneumatikoi” magically during baptism via baptismal waters as a result of a special formula of initiation.<sup>28</sup>

### III. MARCION ATTEMPTS TO DISCREDIT THE OLD TESTAMENT

Marcion considered himself “Christian” reformer and purist. In his book “Antithesis,” Marcion attempted to expose the seemingly irresolvable conflicting natures of the supposedly unloving and inferior God of the Old Testament books versus the loving and superior GOD of the New Testament books. Tillich states of the gnostics in general, and Marcion in particular, that: “Against the public tradition of the Christian churches, they claimed to possess secret traditions known only to the initiated. They rejected the Old Testament because it contradicted many of their fundamental tenets,

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<sup>20</sup> 2, Ferguson, “Backgrounds of Early Christianity,” p 307-313.

<sup>21</sup> 1, Tillich, “A History of Christian Thought,” p 33-37.

<sup>22</sup> 2, Ferguson, “Backgrounds of Early Christianity,” p 307-313.

<sup>23</sup> 4, Bromily, “Historical Theology,” p18,19,36.

<sup>24</sup> 1, Tillich, “A History of Christian Thought,” p 33-37.

<sup>25</sup> 1, Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> 2, Ferguson, “Backgrounds of Early Christianity,” p 307-313.

<sup>27</sup> 4, Bromily, “Historical Theology,” p18,19,36.

<sup>28</sup> 1, Tillich, “A History of Christian Thought,” p 33-37.

especially their dualistic and ascetic tendencies.<sup>29</sup>

Glen Davis in “The Development of the Canon of The New Testament - Marcion and the Marcionites” cites numerous examples of how Marcion attempted to discredit the Old Testament by searching for what he considered contradictions that supposedly showed the God of Israel to be unworthy of worship. For example, Marcion notes that God forbids work on the Sabbath, but ordered the ancient Israelites to carry the Ark of The Covenant around the city walls of Jericho seven times on a Sabbath. Marcion notes that God forbids the making of graven images, but ordered Moses to make a bronze serpent emblem to hold up before the ancient Israelites. Marcion notes the concept that, GOD being omniscient, He is held to have infinite knowledge and understanding of all things. However, GOD called out to Adam in the Garden of Eden, “Where are you?”<sup>30</sup>

For example, Marcion notes that Moses wrote “an eye for an eye,” but that JESUS said we are to forgive those who hurt us. Marcion notes the incident where the prophet Elisha called down a bear to eat children who mocked him, while JESUS said, “Let the little children come unto Me.” Marcion notes that Joshua prayed for the sun in the sky to stop, so as to lengthen the time the ancient Israelites could slaughter their enemies in a battle, whereas Saint Paul wrote that JESUS proclaimed, “Let not the sun go down on your wrath.”<sup>31</sup>

For example, Marcion notes that that Moses authorized divorce and polygamy, whereas JESUS forbid both. Marcion notes that Moses called for strict enforcement of keeping the Jewish Sabbath, whereas JESUS in general set the faithful free from keeping the Jewish Sabbath in a robot-like fashion. Marcion notes that Moses called for a strict enforcement of the Old Testament Law, whereas JESUS set the faithful free from The Law.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> 1, Tillich, “A History of Christian Thought,” p 34.

<sup>30</sup> 8, Davis, “The Development of The Canon of The New Testament – Marcion and The Marcionites,” <http://www.ntcanon.org/Marcion.shtml>.

<sup>31</sup> 8, Ibid.



#### IV. MARCION'S GNOSTIC NEW TESTAMENT

Indeed, it was Marcion's gnostic New Testament in about 140 AD that helped motivate the early Church to begin to form New Testament Canon. Marcion's New Testament completely rejected and eliminated the entire Old Testament, since gnostics held the lesser deity portrayed therein to be evil. It rejected The Gospels of MATTHEW, MARK and JOHN while including only a heavily edited gnosticized Gospel of LUKE.<sup>33</sup>

It further included ten of Saint Paul's letters, which were also heavily edited to agree with gnostic doctrine. Since gnostic doctrine held that JESUS CHRIST was not human but rather a spiritual mirage in human form, all Scripture references to the birth, family, lineage and Old Testament prophecies fulfilled by JESUS CHRIST were completely eliminated. Thus did Marcion audaciously attempt to purge the New Testament of any doctrines contrary to gnosticism.<sup>34 35</sup>

Tillich in "A History of Christian Thought..." states of Marcion's revision of Christian New Testament Books: "The New Testament was not rejected but purged. Marcion was the man who tried to purge the New Testament, leaving the ten main Letters of Paul and the Gospel of Luke, which most clearly bears Pauline influence. Presumably, they did not contain elements which contradicted the basic ideas of gnosticism, as did the other Epistles and Gospels in the New Testament."<sup>36</sup>

Marcion's proposed "Christian" Canon included the following New Testament Books, to which he freely took his pen to edit out what he considered non-gnostic materials. These included a heavily edited Gospel of LUKE, which he renamed "The Evangelicon." His edited collection of Paul's letters he renamed "The Apostolikon," which included first the book of GALATIANS, I and II CORINTHIANS, ROMANS, I and II THESSALONIANS, EPHESIANS which he renamed Laodiceans, COLOSSIANS,

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<sup>32</sup> 8, Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> 1, Tillich, "A History of Christian Thought," p 33-37.

<sup>34</sup> 1, Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> 5, Miller and Huber, "The Bible – A History – The Making and Impact of The Bible," p 92,93,96.

<sup>36</sup> 1, Tillich, "A History of Christian Thought," p 34.

PHILEMON and PHILIPPIANS. <sup>37</sup>

#### V. MARCION REJECTS 3 OF THE 4 GOSPELS, ACCEPTS ONLY LUKE

Glenn Davis in “The Development of the Canon of The New Testament - Marcion and the Marcionites” explores what we can piece together of Marcion’s train of anti-Jewish thought and its radical conclusions. Marcion claimed that the Apostles misunderstood the teachings of JESUS, thinking Him to be The Jewish Messiah sent by the God of The Old Testament. Marcion went so far as to accuse the Apostles and their associates who wrote the Gospels of falsifying the words of JESUS in order to conform to their Jewish expectations of The Messiah based on The Old Testament. He concluded that much of the writings relating to JESUS in Christian books were contaminated with Jewish interpolations. <sup>38</sup>

Thus, to understand the true words, meaning and mission of JESUS, Marcion concluded that all Christian texts must be cleansed of all such Jewish biases. Matthew, Mark and John were all Jews with high regard for the Jewish Old Testament Law, prophets and writings. They were concerned heavily with evangelizing primarily The Jews in the early Church. This perhaps accounts for Marcion’s complete rejection of the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and John, as they all rely heavily on the distinctly Old Testament Jewish roots of JESUS and His mission. <sup>39</sup>

Why Marcion allowed himself to rely heavily on the remaining Gospel of LUKE as more pure and worthy than the others he never addresses. Nor does Marcion address the question of who he thought wrote Luke or his theorized pre-Lukian Gospel. Luke was a highly educated Hellenist, although still also a Jew. As with Saint Paul - who although also was still a Jew - perhaps Marcion perceived Luke to have a heavy focus on the gentile world. This perhaps accounts for Marcion’s heavy reliance on the sole Gospel

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<sup>37</sup> 8, Davis, “The Development of The Canon of The New Testament – Marcion and The Marcionites,” <http://www.ntcanon.org/Marcion.shtml>.

<sup>38</sup> 8, Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> 8, Ibid.

of LUKE. <sup>40</sup>

Marcion remarkably proposed without any external evidence that there had initially been only one true Christian Gospel - a pre-Lukian writing - and that this was dishonestly contaminated with Jewish Old Testament expectations to produce the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. To support this contention, Marcion offered texts from Saint Paul's Letter to the Galatians as internal evidence of this conspiracy. <sup>41</sup>

For example, Marcion cited GALATIANS 1:8-9 as evidence that there was initially only one Gospel. <sup>42</sup> Curiously, the same text in GALATIANS that Marcion cites - seemingly without justifying doing so - seem to clearly condemn him! So we read from Saint Paul in GALATIANS 1:8-9, "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you that 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." <sup>43</sup>

Marcion then offered as evidence that false Christians were supposedly working to turn true Christians away from this hypothesized pre-Lukian pure Christianity the passages of GALATIANS 1:6-7. <sup>44</sup> Curiously again, this very same Scripture seems to clearly warn Christians against accepting Marcion's writings and doctrines! Saint Paul records for us in GALATIANS 1:6-7, "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." <sup>45</sup>

Marcion's rigid quest to remove anything Jewish from Christianity thus forces itself to completely edited out GALATIANS 3:16-4:6. This, as Davis notes, is

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<sup>40</sup> 8, Davis, "The Development of The Canon of The New Testament – Marcion and The Marcionites," <http://www.ntcanon.org/Marcion.shtml>.

<sup>41</sup> 8, Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> 8, Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> 9, KJV, GALATIANS 1:8-9.

<sup>44</sup> 8, Davis, "The Development of The Canon of The New Testament – Marcion and The Marcionites," <http://www.ntcanon.org/Marcion.shtml>.

presumably because in this text Saint Paul talks about “the descendants of Abraham, The Old Testament Law and the Christian’s relationship to The Law.” Thus, in order to reclaim the pure non-Jewish Lukian Gospel, Marcion further eliminates all of Luke Chapters 1 through 4. This includes the elimination of the texts in Luke describing the immaculate conception of JESUS, the fulfilling of Jewish prophesies by the birth of JESUS, the ministry of John The Baptist and the Jewish maternal genealogy of JESUS.<sup>46</sup>

Marcion, in keeping with his gnostic rejection that JESUS ever had a fully human body during his earthly ministry, comes across this specific stumbling block written by the Apostle John that insists otherwise, calling anyone who denies JESUS as having had a human body as “Antichrist.” In rejecting the Gospel of John, Marcion’s heretical editing is - if nothing else - zealously consistent. Saint John specifically writes that anyone who rejects the physical reality of JESUS as having a fully human body during his earthly ministry is “antichrist“ and a “false prophet.” Understanding Marcion’s prejudices, while appreciating that I JOHN defines Marcion as the very definition of a false prophet, it is not surprising that he rejected the letters of Saint John as well.<sup>47</sup>

So Saint John records in I JOHN 4:1-3: “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of GOD: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of GOD: Every spirit that confesseth that JESUS CHRIST is come in the flesh is of GOD: And every spirit that confesseth not that JESUS CHRIST is come in the flesh is not of GOD: And this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is in the world!”<sup>48</sup>

## VI. POLYCARP AN ANTI-GNOSTIC CHURCH FATHER

The early Church father and apologist Polycarp wrote a letter to a Church in Philippi circa 130 AD. Although he does not specifically refer to Marcion and the

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<sup>45</sup> 9, KJV, GALATIANS 1:6-7.

<sup>46</sup> 8, Davis, “The Development of The Canon of The New Testament – Marcion and The Marcionites,” <http://www.ntcanon.org/Marcion.shtml>.

<sup>47</sup> 10, Kiefer, “Biographical Sketches... Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, Theologian.” <http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bio/194.html>.

<sup>48</sup> 9, KJV, I JOHN 4:1-3.

gnostics, Polycarp refutes the basic foundations of Marcion's views. He does so by reaffirming the importance of The Old Testament to Christians. He further reaffirms that JESUS had a true material human body, and thus reaffirms the incarnation of JESUS, the death of JESUS on The Cross and the resurrection of JESUS from death..<sup>49 50</sup>

Charles Niesen, "in Polycarp and Marcion: A Note," reviews Polycarp's "Letter to the Philippians." Niesen notes that Polycarp does not specifically refer to Marcion by name, but rather refers to a "false teacher." Many apparently have held that Polycarp's "false teacher" is in fact Marcion. Regardless, Polycarp refutes gnosticism directly with his statement in 7:1 of his letter: Polycarp specifically repeats the warning of Saint John that anyone who denies that JESUS walked his earthly ministry in a fully human body is "antichrist:" [Polycarp's "Letter to the Philippians, 7:1], "For whoever does not confess that JESUS CHRIST has come in the flesh is Antichrist."<sup>51</sup> This echoes such passages as II JOHN 1:7, "For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that JESUS CHRIST is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist!"<sup>52</sup>

## VII. IRENAEUS AN ANTI-GNOSTIC CHURCH FATHER

Irenaeus had heard the teaching of Polycarp, who himself had been taught by Saint John. Irenaeus was a presbyter in The Church in Lyons in what is now France. He traveled on Church business to and from Rome, becoming Bishop of Lyons about 177 AD. He wrote a refutation of gnosticism in his "Refutation and Overthrow of The Knowindge Falsely So Called," also known as "The Five Books Against the Heresies." Irenaeus also wrote "Proof of Apostolic Preaching," in which he further refutes gnosticism by showing the importance of the Old Testament in that JESUS was sent to fulfill the prophesies of salvation for mankind by the one true GOD Who inspired its authorship.<sup>53 54 55</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> 11, Davis, "The Development of The Canon of The New Testament – Polycarp of Smyrna," <http://www.ntcanon.org/Polycarp.shtml>.

<sup>50</sup> 6, Nielson, "Polycarp and Marcion: A Note," Theological Studies, Vol. 47, Issue 2, p 297-299. June, 1986.

<sup>51</sup> 6, Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> 9, KJV, II JOHN 1:7. See also I JOHN 2:18,22.

<sup>53</sup> 4, Bromily, "Historical Theology," p18,19,36.

Bromily in “Historical Theology - An Introduction” notes that Irenaeus held that The Gospels came from the Apostles in both oral and written form “first preached it abroad, and then later by the will of GOD handed it down to us in writings, to be the foundation and pillar of our faith.” Bromily reports that Irenaeus then chastises the gnostics, in that they, “will not agree with either Scripture or tradition.” In other words, Irenaeus accuses the gnostics of picking and choosing what they wish to accept and reject from both the written Gospels and oral apostolic tradition to justify their doctrines.<sup>56</sup>

Irenaeus also attacks the gnostics on their concept of descending spirit into matter through a multiple layered hierarchy of “aeons.” The gnostics claimed that the one true GOD, being the ultimate spiritual good, had to separate Himself from the true evil material world and its wicked deity JEHOVAH via this spiritual hierarchy. Irenaeus points out that, according to this logic, at some point one of the descending good spiritual aeons would have had to become evil matter. Kiefer in “...Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, Theologian,” summarizes Irenaeus’ criticism of the gnostics: “How can the perfect produce the imperfect, the infinite produce the finite, the spiritual produce the material?... Assuming the gnostic view of the matter, each of the thirty [aeons] must be either finite or infinite, material or non-material, and somewhere along the line you would have an infinite being producing a finite one, a spiritual being producing a material one.”<sup>57</sup>

Irenaeus found The Gospel of JOHN to be of particular clarity in refuting gnostic heresies. JOHN 1 clearly equates GOD The Father Creator as one with JESUS CHRIST The Son Savior, thus refuting the foundation tenet of gnosticism of a lesser evil God The Creator versus a greater good God The Savior:<sup>58</sup> So Saint John declares in JOHN 1:1-2, “In the beginning was The Word, and The Word was with GOD, and The Word was

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<sup>54</sup> 10, Kiefer, “Biographical Sketches... Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, Theologian.”  
<http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bio/194.html>.

<sup>55</sup> 12, Behr, “...Irenaeus Identified The Books of The New Testament, Then Showed The Church How They Fit With The Old,” Christian History, Vol. 22, Issue 80, No. 4, page 16-17.

<sup>56</sup> 4, Bromily, “Historical Theology,” p 19-20.

<sup>57</sup> 10, Kiefer, “Biographical Sketches... Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, Theologian.”  
<http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bio/194.html>.

GOD. He was in the beginning with GOD; all things were made through Him, and without him was not anything made that was made.”<sup>59</sup>

JOHN 1 also clearly states that JESUS CHRIST was a true man, thus refuting the gnostic concept of JESUS CHRIST as a nonhuman divine apparition:<sup>60</sup> For we read in JOHN 1:14 that “...The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld His glory, glory as of the only Son from The Father.”<sup>61</sup>

Irenaeus - having established the one good GOD The Father Creator as one with the one good GOD The Son Savior - then shows the divinely inspired validity The Old Testament using the Genesis account of creation. GOD pronounces good all of creation, which directly refutes the gnostic idea of creation being evil:<sup>62</sup> So Moses recorded in GENESIS 1:31a, “And GOD saw every thing that He had made, and, behold, it was very good!”<sup>63</sup>

Irenaeus called this dualistic lesser evil God versus a greater good God concept of gnosticism a “blasphemia cratoris;” a blasphemy against GOD The Creator. Irenaeus clarified that GOD is one in His unity: The Old Testament Law of Moses is completed in our present New Testament Grace of JESUS CHRIST; GOD designed both creation and salvation as good; GOD The Father is one with GOD The Son; all that The One GOD creates and purposes is good. Thus, the fallen nature of creation and man from original created good is not evidence of divine duality, but rather in the need for the free will of man to choose fellowship with GOD.<sup>64</sup>

In answering Marcion’s claim that JESUS offered special spiritual teachings to His Disciples, Irenaeus is summed up by Kiefer thus: “If JESUS did have a special secret

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<sup>58</sup> 4, Bromily, “Historical Theology,” p18,19,36.

<sup>59</sup> 9, KJV, JOHN 1:1-2.

<sup>60</sup> 4, Bromily, “Historical Theology,” p18,19,36.

<sup>61</sup> 9, KJV, JOHN 1:14.

<sup>62</sup> 4, Bromily, “Historical Theology,” p18,19,36.

<sup>63</sup> 9, KJV, GENESIS 1:31a.

<sup>64</sup> 1, Tillich, “A History of Christian Thought,” p 33-37.

teaching, to whom would He entrust it? Clearly, to His disciples, to the twelve, who were with Him constantly, and to whom He spoke without reservation (MARK 4:34). And was the teaching of the Twelve different from that of Paul? Here the gnostics, and others since, have tried to drive a wedge between Paul and the original Apostles, but Peter writes of Paul in the highest terms (II PETER 3:15), as one whose teaching is authentic. Again, we find Paul saying to the elders of the church at Ephesus (ACTS 20:27) that he has declared to them the whole counsel of GOD. “<sup>65</sup>

Saint Mark clearly states that JESUS revealed all knowledge to His intimate followers and that there was no secret spiritual knowledge. This directly refutes the gnostic contention of special secret knowledge given by JESUS to his Apostles. One can see here an example of why Marcion therefore excluded MARK from his canon. For Saint Mark declares in MARK 4:34: “But without a parable spake He [JESUS] not unto them: and when they were alone, He expounded all things to His disciples.”<sup>66</sup>

Saint Peter affirms that he held Paul in high regard. Had there been secret gnostic doctrines in Paul’s teachings in the Name of JESUS contrary to what Saint Peter had learned directly from our Lord, he would not have written as in one accord with him. One can see here an example of why Marcion therefore excluded I and II PETER from his canon. For II PETER 3:15 declares, “And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you.”<sup>67</sup>

And when Saint Paul addressed the Ephesian Christian elders, he assured them that no special secret knowledge of salvation had been held back from them by him in any way. Thus we have an example of why Marcion excluded The Book of ACTS from his canon in ACTS 20:27: “For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of

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<sup>65</sup> 10, Kiefer, “Biographical Sketches... Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, Theologian.”  
<http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bio/194.html>.

<sup>66</sup> 9, KJV, MARK 4:34.

<sup>67</sup> 9, KJV, II PETER 3:15.



GOD.”<sup>68</sup>

Irenaeus points to Saint Paul’s I CORINTHIANS, in which is proclaimed that JESUS died, was buried and resurrected again specifically according to The Old Testament. This Irenaeus uses as further discrediting gnosticism, which would have us believe that The entire Old Testament is to be discarded.<sup>69</sup> But Saint Paul declares in I CORINTHINS 15:3-4, “For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that CHRISST died for our sins according to the Scriptures; And that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.”<sup>70</sup>

Irenaeus points to The Gospel of JOHN, in which JESUS berates the unbelief of certain of the ruling Jews, noting specifically that Moses wrote of JESUS Himself in the Old Testament. It is again little wonder that Marcion rejected the entire Gospel of JOHN, in which JESUS clearly validates once again The Old Testament:<sup>71</sup> JOHN 5:46, “For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed Me: for he wrote of Me.”<sup>72</sup>

### VIII. TERTULLIAN AN ANTI-GNOSTIC CHURCH FATHER

The text of Marcion’s “Antithesis” did not survive into our time, and so we must rely on anti-gnostic Church fathers like Tertullian to discern the doctrines of Marcion. Tertullian wrote specifically against Marcion’s gnostic ideas in his “Adversus Marcionem.”<sup>73</sup>

Tertullian was the creator of Christian terminology in Latin and a master of Latin rhetoric. He offered that the human soul is naturally Christian [Greek “anima naturaliter christiana”]. He further developed the Christian concept of The Trinity and produced the

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<sup>68</sup> KJV, ACTS 20:27.

<sup>69</sup> 12, Behr, “...Irenaeus Identified The Books of The New Testament, Then Showed The Church How They Fit With The Old,” Christian History, Vol. 22, Issue 80, No. 4, page 16-17.

<sup>70</sup> 9, KJV, I CORINTHINS 15:3-4.

<sup>71</sup> 12, Behr, “...Irenaeus Identified The Books of The New Testament, Then Showed The Church How They Fit With The Old,” Christian History, Vol. 22, Issue 80, No. 4, page 16-17.

<sup>72</sup> 9, KJV, JOHN 5:46.

<sup>73</sup> 8, Davis, “The Development of The Canon of The New Testament – Marcion and The Marcionites,” <http://www.ntcanon.org/Marcion.shtml>.

word “trinitas“ to describe the triune nature of GOD. Tertullian clarified that GOD The Father, GOD The Son and GOD The Holy Spirit are all of one substance [Greek “una substantia”] but a power of being of three self-manifestations [Greek “tres personae”].<sup>74</sup> Thus, Tertullian argued clearly against the Marcion gnostic concept of GOD as The Creator of all things being evil and less than GOD The Father. Tertullian’s logic reveals the absurdity of the gnostic idea that the GOD Himself created a deity slightly less than Himself called JESUS CHRIST that He sent Himself to overthrow GOD The Creator Himself!

Returning to Genesis, Tertullian also reinforced the Biblical thesis that man, having been created by an all perfect and good GOD The Father, was created good. Man fell into evil when Adam and Eve rebelled against GOD’s prohibition to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good versus evil in the Garden of Eden. Being made after GOD’s likeness, it is The Redeemer JESUS CHRIST who offers in eternal life to men a forgiveness of sin and a return to goodness as a free gift, thereby being restored to everlasting fellowship with GOD.<sup>75</sup> Thus, Tertullian directly contradict the concepts of Marcion and his gnosticism, which would have us believe that man was created evil, that special divine knowledge will give man an earned eternal life in everlasting fellowship with GOD.

#### IX. RESPONSES OF THE CHURCH TO MARCION’S GNOSTICISM

To counter the gnostic heresies establishing themselves within and around the early Church, orthodox and acceptable Christian doctrine and cannon were defended by four developing concepts, including Apostolic Tradition, Rule of Faith, the Bishops, the Baptismal Creed and establishing the New Testament cannon of the Bible.

Apostolic Tradition - [Greek “traditio apostolica“] - says that what New Testament Scripture was written at the time of the Apostles by the Apostles or their close associates is valid for all times and is a fingerprint of a book being considered canon.

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<sup>74</sup> 1, Tillich, “A History of Christian Thought,” p 33-37.

<sup>75</sup> 1, Ibid.

Thus, any books written in time later than or in doctrine outside of the Apostolic Tradition are not canonical.<sup>76</sup> The Rule of Faith - [Greek “regula fidei”] - limits how Scripture can be interpreted as within the bounds of orthodox and official Church doctrine. The gnostic Marcion “Bible” employed a number of New Testament Christian books, but was outside the Rule of Faith because of interpretation outside of orthodox and official Church doctrine.<sup>77 78</sup>

The Bishops - as successors of the Apostles have the divinely inspired gift of truth - mediate the Rule of Faith that helps identify what book is canonical and what book is not. Marcion’s proposed New Testament canon forced the Bishops to begin addressing exactly what was and was not acceptable orthodox Christian canon. This developing authority of Church councils of Bishops expressing Church doctrine and cannon through the majority votes of the Bishops later became finalized in the Council of Nicea in 325 AD. Here the Church Bishops determined the nature of GOD The Son in relation to GOD The Father and produced a standard Christian creed, the Nicene Creed.<sup>79</sup>

The Baptismal Creed is also mediated by the Bishops for the same reasons, producing a Church-wide standard of what was to be considered acceptable Christian doctrine. Marcion’s proposed New Testament and the strong presence of gnosticism within and around the early Church. The primary sacrament in early Christianity was the baptism. Thus were the Bishops compelled to also define acceptable orthodox Christian doctrine in the form of a Baptismal Creed that brief reinforcing summary of the Rule of Faith for all Christians.<sup>80</sup>

The Bible officially eventually established what early Christian era books were acceptable as canon in the establishment of The Bible. Oregin’s consensus lists of “accepted” and “questionable” books being widely used in the Church in the early 200’s

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<sup>76</sup> 1, Tillich, “A History of Christian Thought,” p 33-37.

<sup>77</sup> 1, Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> 5, Miller and Huber, “The Bible – A History – The Making and Impact of The Bible,” p 92,93,96.

<sup>79</sup> 1, Tillich, “A History of Christian Thought,” p 33-37.

<sup>80</sup> 1, Ibid.

AD form the basis for the book contents of our New Testament today. When the Christianized Roman Emperor Constantine asked the Christian theologian Eusebius to produce 50 Bibles for 50 Churches in his new capitol of Constantinople, Eusebius turned to Oregin's lists of accepted and questionable books for his New Testament. In 367 AD, Bishop Athanasius sent out an Easter letter of encouragement to the Churches under his authority which spelled out a clear New Testament canon identical to that of Eusebius' New Testament list. Athanasius' Easter letter New Testament canon list was officially affirmed as official orthodox canon at by the Council of Hippo in 393 AD, the Council of Carthage in 397 AD and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Council of Carthage in 419 AD.<sup>81</sup>

## X. CONCLUSIONS

Selected common themes of gnosticism were noted. Marcion's efforts to produce a written supposedly Christian canon explored his total rejection of the Old Testament, 3 of the 4 Gospels of the Apostles and his heavy editing of the remaining Gospel of Luke and certain of the Pauline letters. Select efforts of early Church fathers such as Polycarp, Irenaeus and Tertullian reveal the overwhelming and wide range of illogical and contradictory themes of Marcion's doctrines and writings.

The vital importance of The Old Testament to Christianity is noted, without which the Messiahship of JESUS can not be fully understood or appreciated. The 4 Gospels and various letters of the New Testament - even in Marcion's time - were understood by major Church fathers to be the fulfillment of Judaism's Old Testament Scriptures. Lastly - and perhaps most providentially - the responses of the early Church to Marcion spurred on the clarification of what is now Christianity's New Testament canon.

If Marcion's gnostic New Testament had prevailed as The Christian Bible, the entire Old Testament would have been lost to The Church. JESUS CHRIST - being only one of the gnostic "aoens" - would have been lost as the sole focus of salvation within

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<sup>81</sup> 5, Miller and Huber, "The Bible – A History – The Making and Impact of The Bible," p 92,93,96.

Christianity, which may well have opened the door for many forms of Christian pantheism. Marcion's views that all of creation and every aspect of this earthly are evil may well have led to The Church to secede from history and society.

The success of Marcionism may thus have caused The Church to become marginalized, thus depriving Western civilization and the world of Christian piety, worth and salvation. Salvation itself would have become highly elitist, being open to only those few who grasp liberating gnostic knowledge. Finally, the arbitrary and contrived doctrines of gnosticism - had they become the foundations of Christianity - would probably have resulted in a continuing revelation evolution of Christianity so alien to its present form that it would today be unrecognizable. Thus did Divine Providence assure the message of salvation of Christianity to all mankind for all time by rejecting Marcionism and his gnosticism. In the Name of GOD The Father, and The Son and The Holy Ghost. AMEN!

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