

## Marcion, The Quasi-Gnostic-Christian

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The furor that the second century heretic Marcion of Sinope caused the early Church did not cease in the fifth century, rather, Marcion and his teachings continue to plague modern scholarship with problems of definition, classification, and clarification. Should Marcion be placed under the umbrella of orthodox Christianity or within the sphere of gnostic influence? This paper will argue that one cannot classify Marcion as either a Gnostic or as a Christian using standard, "orthodox" definitions, but rather a combination of the two. He does not fit into either category but deserves one of his own, a category this paper will call, "quasi-Gnostic-Christian," or "heterodox Gnostic and heterodox Christian." Every modern interpreter of Marcion has had to consider whether or not Marcion should be called a Gnostic. According to Gerhard May, to ask if Marcion was a Gnostic or not is irrelevant because of the fluidity of definitions.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, some effort of classification, even if it means scrambling the categories, may be helpful in uncovering the particularities of Marcion.<sup>2</sup>

A problem apparent at the beginning of our investigation involves the definition of what constitutes "orthodoxy." This word comes from the Greek *orthos* and *doxa*, which when combined can mean "correct belief or thought." "Gnosticism" and "Christianity" are broad terms incorporating many different views. To avoid a tautology and for matters of definition,

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1 Gerhard May states, "Our modern concepts of Gnosis and Gnosticism are indispensable, yet they are abstractions; as such they are more clear-cut than the historical reality... Thus it does not lead anywhere, depending on what concept of Gnosticism is used as a basis, if one designates Marcion as a Gnostic of a special kind or if one no longer wants to see him as a Gnostic" ("Marcion in Contemporary Views: Results and Open Questions," *Second Century* 6 [Fall, 1987-88]: 144).

2 This paper uses the category of "different" instead of "unique" in reference to Marcion's thoughts because of the recent illumination of Jonathan Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago, 1990).

conventional Gnosticism will refer to the proposed definition of the Congress of Messina (1966).<sup>3</sup> Orthodox Christianity, in a flux during the first three centuries (the period most crucial to this paper), will refer to the emerging position of the Catholic Church as symbolized both in the growing consensus among the early Church Fathers and in the creeds of the major councils (Nicea, 325; Ephesus, 431; Chalcedon, 451).

May cautions about several problems which arise in forming a consensus about Marcion: the problems of sources, biographical information, and portraits of Marcion from tradition. Concerning these he concludes that for the first problem, we must use the old witnessing texts as the basis of reconstructing Marcion; for the second, we must realize that the biographical information which comes from the two source streams of (1) Tertullian and (2) Pseudo-Tertullian, Epiphanius, and Filastrias, offers no consensus but only contradictions; and for the third, we must also understand that all the ancient sources are not completely objective but tend towards polemics. He says, "Research must accept these facts and attempt to see the original Marcion in reflection of tradition."<sup>4</sup> Any scientific approach to Marcion must put tradition against tradition, and anything beyond the written sources tends to mere conjecture.<sup>5</sup> The following brief study will rely on the interpretation of secondary sources and also will utilize primary sources when pertinent.

## I. BIOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND

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<sup>3</sup> See Giovanni Filoramo, *A History of Gnosticism* (Cambridge, MA, and Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1990) 143, for the Congress's statement on Gnosticism.

<sup>4</sup> May, 143.

<sup>5</sup> Adolf von Harnack offers that the extent of our sources of information give us "(1) the accounts of his alleged 'system' as given by his opponents; we know (2) the scope of his bible, and many selections from it are handed down to us verbatim; we know (3) about the principles of his biblical criticism, and numbers of his emendations are available to us; finally, (4) extensive remnants of his great work *Antithesis* have come down to us, together with numerous explanations of biblical passages" (Marcion: The Gospel of the Alien God, trans. by John E. Steely and Lyle D. Bierma [Durham, NC: Labyrinth Press, 1990], 14).

Mystery surrounds the precise biography of Marcion's life.<sup>6</sup> According to Tertullian (in graphic description; *Adversus Marcion*, I.1.) Marcion was born in Sinope of Pontus, a port on the Black Sea. One tradition offers that he may have been the son of the (or a) bishop of Pontus who "excommunicated" him because he violated a virgin (Hippolytus, in his lost *Syntagma*). Hoffmann<sup>7</sup> gives this sketch of Marcion's career: born c. A.D. 70 in Sinope, active in Asia Minor c. 110-150, and died c. 154.<sup>8</sup> Harnack<sup>9</sup> (and most other scholars) says that Marcion was born around 85 or later. Marcion may have been a ship builder or owner, or a sailor, which afforded him the opportunity of travel which he used to spread the rival church that he founded.<sup>10</sup> The only truly reliable date in his life is 144 when he was expelled from the Church at Rome for his heretical teachings.<sup>11</sup> A gift of 200,000 sesterces that he had given the church was returned. The Marcionite church spread throughout the Roman Empire and to the East, becoming the chief rival of the orthodox Church.<sup>12</sup> Marcion wrote a work entitled *Antithesis*, now lost except for

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6 R. Joseph Hoffmann devotes a whole chapter to the discussion of the sources of information and the traditions which the Fathers and others hand down concerning the life of Marcion (*Marcion: On the Restitution of Christianity* [Chico, CA: Scholars Press [1984], 31-74).

7 Ibid., 74.

8 Ibid. May considers Hoffmann's book a failure full of improbabilities and methodological errors. He says that Hoffmann dates Marcion 15 years earlier than most so that he can build his hypothesis that Marcion was a key figure in the process of the canonization of the New Testament ("Marcion in Contemporary Views," 131). See also May's review of Hoffmann's book in "Ein neues Marcionbild?" *Theologische Rundschau* 51 (1986): 404-130.

9 Harnack, 15.

10 See Tertullian references to *nauclerus*, *Adversus Marcion*.

11 David Wayne Deakle, ("The Fathers Against Marcionism: A Study of the Methods and Motives in the Developing Patristic Anti-Marcionite Polemic," Ph.D. diss., Saint Louis University, 1991), 24; Tertullian, 1.19; Sinope was the most important Greek commercial city on the south shore of the Black Sea (Harnack, 15). Harnack offers that July 4, 144, was the date that later Marcionites celebrated as the founding of their church.

12 Evidence for this is ample. Almost every Church Father mentions Marcion or the heresy of Marcionism. By 150 Justin Martyr said that Marcion's influence had spread throughout the Roman world (*kata pan genos anthropon*, *Apology*, 1.26; quoted by E.C. Blackman, *Marcion and His Influence* (London: S.P.C.K., 1948) 3). Epiphanius (A.D. 315-404) described this spread reaching Rome, Italy, Egypt, Palestine, Arabia, Syria, Cyprus, and Persia (*Refutation of all Heresies*, xlii, I). According to Harnack, "Celsus often spoke as though there were only the two churches, the 'great church' and the Marcionite, and alongside them only Gnostic underbrush" (100).

quotations by the Fathers, in which he treats contradictions between the Hebrew Scriptures and Christian writings. Marcion as a person may be elusive, but his essential teachings can be more easily detected.

## II. BRIEF OVERVIEW OF MARCION'S ESSENTIAL TEACHINGS

According to Tertullian<sup>13</sup>, the point of departure for Marcion's message was the Pauline antithesis of law and gospel, retribution and love, as he perceived it in Romans and Galatians. The gospel message as taught by Jesus and Paul is one of pure grace, freely given by a "Good" God who could not have anything to do with the world, for if he did, then his grace would not be free. This God cannot be anything but pure grace revealing himself as redeemer of trapped humanity.<sup>14</sup> Harnack says, "There it is demanded by the nature of his redemption that the redeemer God, who is God in truth, had not appeared to men in any revelation of any kind before his appearance in Christ; he may be understood only as absolutely Alien."<sup>15</sup> Elsewhere Harnack states, "Now, actually and for the first time in the history of religions, 'the unknown and alien God' had appeared, prompted by merciful love alone, on a redemptive mission in a world that did not at all concern him, because he had made nothing in it."<sup>16</sup>

Marcion saw two principles at work in the universe, not in a philosophical sense, but based upon his practical understanding of the gospel. One principle is based upon law or justice, the other upon grace. The latter comes from the nature of the Good God as described above. The

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13 Tertullian writes, "The separation of Law and Gospel is the primary and principal exploit of Marcion. His disciples cannot deny this, which stands at the head of their document, that document by which they are inducted into and confirmed in this heresy. For such are Marcion's *Antitheses*, or Contrary Oppositions, which are designed to show the conflict and disagreement of the Gospel and the law, so that from the diversity of principles between those two documents they may argue further for a diversity of gods" (*Adv. Marcion*, I.19).

14 Harnack says, "All else is rigidly to be excluded; God is not the creator, not the lawgiver, not the judge; he does not become wrathful and does not punish but is exclusively love incarnate, redeeming, and blessing" (13).

15 *Ibid.*, 22.

16 *Ibid.*, 3. See further Tertullian, *Adv. Marcion*, I.8; V. 16.

first principle finds its source in another God called the "Just" God, creator of the world. The principle of law is responsible for the human predicament, the obligation to do good but the inability to do so.<sup>17</sup> Harnack describes the weakness of the Creator God as so: "his ignorance of the existence of the other God; his profane revealedness; the identity of his nature with the nature of the world (even though it is the higher); and the base and contemptible method of procreation which he has arranged or which he at least tolerates."<sup>18</sup> To these can be added this God's creation of a weak humanity and his tolerance of sin, death, and the devil; his sending of punitive ills and punishment; his practice of punishing the children for their father's sins; his infliction of stubbornness in the obstinate; his jealousy which kept Adam from the tree of Life; and his partiality to those who worship him.<sup>19</sup>

Marcion's concern here is not cosmological but soteriological.<sup>20</sup> Jesus Christ is the compassionate revealer of the Good God who has intervened in the domain of the Just God in order to redeem humanity.<sup>21</sup> Christ's blood purchased the alienated humanity from the Creator as a transfer of property, and this frees up humanity from the grips of the Just God and the Law. Moreover, as Jonas says, "The purchase price was Christ's blood, which was given not for the remission of sins or the cleansing of mankind from guilt or as a vicarious atonement fulfilling the Law--not, in brief, for any reconciliation of mankind with God--but for the cancellation of the creator's claim to his property."<sup>22</sup> Christ comes to free humanity from the curse of the Law, as the

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17 Blackman, 71.

18 Harnack, 70-71.

19 Ibid., 69. Robert Grant suggests that Marcion's "mythology" could be called "haggada" ("Notes on Gnosis," *Vigiliae Christianae* 11 (1957): 146.

20 Blackman (79) quotes F. C. Burkitt (incomplete reference) as saying, "Marcion was only a cosmologist by accident...."

21 Blackman says that the idea of a good God "who is stranger to the universe and who yet intervenes once, catastrophically, in Christ, to redeem mankind, is a conspicuous weakness in Marcion's system" (Ibid., 76).

22 Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), 139.

end (abolishment) of the Law (Rom. 10:4). In this he does away with the Old Testament and its system of requirements. Marcion did not believe Jesus to be the Jewish Messiah. The Jews could still expect their military hero who at best could only bring a temporary peace<sup>23</sup> Significantly, Marcion believed matter to be evil, the collaboration of matter and the Just God. Hence, Christ could not have come in the flesh because Christ was perfect grace, the revelation of the Good God. This led Marcion to a docetistic understanding of the Christ event. To have Christ born in the flesh would imply that he belonged to the Creator God.<sup>24</sup> "Instead, God was manifested in human form and put himself in a position to feel, to act, and to suffer as a man, although the identity with a naturally begotten body of flesh was only apparent since the substance of the flesh was absent."<sup>25</sup> Marcion's distaste for the flesh and matter influenced his ethics. His ethics can be described as "world-renouncing and severe ordering and conduct of life."<sup>26</sup>

Because the gospel appeared as the only message from the Good God, everything else remained inferior since it existed in the domain of the Just God. Therefore, the Old Testament must be rejected precisely because it was inferior. That is not to say that Marcion believed the OT as inaccurate or false. Rather, he believed it an accurate account of the history of the Jewish people and a source of moral law. Thus, Marcion rejected the OT because he did not find in it the message of the redeeming God but only the legalism of the Creator God.<sup>27</sup> Hoffmann states, "Marcion believed that the Twelve had fathered a tradition of false teaching in the Church, the only remedy for which was the careful restitution of Paul's gospel."<sup>28</sup> So Marcion created his

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23 Tertullian, *Adv. Marcion*, III. 15.

24 Blackman, 100.

25 Harnack, 83.

26 Because of this understanding, marriage and sexual intercourse were forbidden with the Marcionite community. This was for two purposes: to liberate one from the flesh, and to restrict the realm of the creator God (*Ibid.*, 96).

27 Blackman, 112-114, 124.

28 Hoffmann, 146. Cf. Paul's statements concerning his "true" gospel compared to the "false"

own canon of Christian literature which had either been penned by Paul or been under his direct influence. Hence, his text consisted of revised versions of the Gospel of Luke and the ten letters of Paul minus the Pastoral Epistles.<sup>29</sup> In doing this, Marcion may have been the first to publish a fixed canon of scripture for the Christian community.

In general, Marcion rejected philosophical speculation for a more practical, existential approach, especially regarding interpretation of scripture. He was concerned with the plain, literal meaning of scripture and rejected the allegorical. This interpretation was one reason why he discarded the Old Testament and parts of the New Testament which were known to him. Rather than allegorize a passage to find a Christian meaning (one of the contemporary methods among the Fathers that was to continue for many centuries), he would simply "edit" the text of any Jewish elements. This is evident from the fragments of his work quoted by his various opponents.<sup>30</sup> Along with Paul (Rom. 7) Marcion believed the law as holy, good, and spiritual, but since it comes from the Just God it must be confined to sinful existence.<sup>31</sup>

Attempts have been made to reconstruct Marcion's lost Antitheses by using the extant quotations from various heresiologists--actually an impossible task.<sup>32</sup> Harnack offers several significant insights into this work. As previously noted (note 11), this book treats the apparent "antitheses" found within scripture, most significantly the antithesis between law and gospel, that

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gospel of the Judaizers in Galatians 1. This chapter of Galatians is very important in Marcion's understanding of Paul.

29 There is conjecture among scholars as to why Marcion did not include the Pastoral Epistles in his canon. Possibly Marcion did not know of them due to their late appearance on the scene, or he could have rejected them because of their unPauline flavor. Cf. B. Paul Wolfe, "Scripture in the Pastoral Epistles: PreMarcion Marcionism," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 16 (Spring, 1989): 5-16.

30 David Williams offers that the safest and surest approach to reconstructing Marcion's gospel is to use "explicit correlated readings," by which he means, passages both Tertullian and Epiphanius cite. He then gives several charts describing twenty-three such readings ("Reconsidering Marcion's Gospel," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 108 [Fall, 1989]: 477-496).

31 Harnack, 75. Interesting, Hoffmann states, "The centerpiece of Marcion's gospel is Luke 6:43, which he interpreted allegorically to refer to the two gods and the consequent separation of the covenants" (115, emphasis mine). Cf. Tertullian, *Adv. Marcion*, 1.2.1.; 4.1.1.; 4.6.1f.

32 Most significantly, see Harnack's work, especially in the original German edition.

is, the Just God and the Good God. Marcion wanted to show the insufficiency of law, the Old Testament, and the Just God when compared to the gracious and new message of the Good God as revealed through Christ. Marcionites may have taken this book to be an authoritative addition Marcion's scripture. In many ways, this book was a commentary upon Marcion's scripture as well as upon passages from "Judaistic" scriptures, including both the Old Testament and certain texts of the New Testament (such as Matthew), in an attempt to show the contradiction of law and gospel. The most frequently used word is "new." According to Harnack, Marcion attempted to think in Christian terms, but could not adequately express his thoughts in this brief work.<sup>33</sup>

### III. MARCION AS A HETERODOX GNOSTIC AND HETERODOX CHRISTIAN

As the title of this paper hints, if Marcion is to be called a Gnostic, he must be called an unorthodox Gnostic. The opinion of modern scholarship varies concerning whether or not Marcion should be called a Gnostic. The German school, as first represented by Harnack, has not viewed Marcion as a Gnostic.<sup>34</sup> Harnack, as the first major modern interpreter of Marcion, has argued that when weighing the similarities and differences of Marcion and Gnosticism, the differences are more significant. Marcion was closer to orthodox Christianity than most Gnostics. He may have learned from them and they from him.<sup>35</sup> Wilson, following Harnack's closely, also says that Marcion was not a Gnostic.<sup>36</sup> Several years later, Blackman attempted to swing the pendulum the other way by saying that indeed Marcion does have much in common

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33 Harnack, 53-63.

34 Ugo Bianchi, "Marcion: Theologien Biblique ou Docteur Gnostique?" *Vigilinae Christianae* 21 (1967): 141.

35 Harnack, 173, note 1.

36 Robert Wilson graphically expresses, "We do wrong to Marcion when we class him as a Gnostic, and leave him to share the honours with Valentinus and Basilides. He differed greatly from these, and his interests lay in a different direction. They were concerned to produce a system, rounded and complete, that would commend itself to speculative minds. Marcion's concern was practical--with life itself, and not with aeons and goblins!["?] In his system there is no pleroma, there are no aeons, no dynamis, no syzygies, no suffering sophia" (*Marcion: A Study of a Second-Century Heretic* [London: James Clarke, 1932], 176-177).



with Gnosticism, maybe enough to call him a Gnostic. He says that Marcion was closer to gnostic thinkers of the second century than Harnack granted.<sup>37</sup> Jonas also argues that Marcion's ideas are clearly gnostic.<sup>38</sup> The pendulum has come to rest in the center in more recent studies. Deakle, for example, claims that Marcion is not a Gnostic but Marcionism is.<sup>39</sup> Hoffmann points out that "the attribution of the term 'gnostic' to Marcion was less common among the heresiologists than later scholarship has assumed to be the case."<sup>40</sup> Finally, May suggests that the sharpest contrast between Marcion and the majority of Gnostics is his stance towards Christian tradition.<sup>41</sup> This paper, then, fits well within the lower swing of the scholarly pendulum. Marcion cannot be called a common Gnostic because of the decidedly Christian elements within his beliefs.

Significant in this question arises the relation of Marcion to Cerdo. According to tradition (Irenaeus and Hippolytus), when Marcion went to Rome, he came under the influence of a man named Cerdo who may have been in Rome during the bishopric of Hyginus.<sup>42</sup> According to Blackman, Marcion could have met Cerdo at that time (maybe around 139), and fallen under Cerdo's influence, if not directly, then circuitously in the formulation of his ideas.<sup>43</sup> According

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37 For his argument, he refers to Irenaeus, *Adversus Heresies*, 2.31.1.

38 Jonas, 137f; see note 46 below. It is interesting that Marcion and his followers are studied in books on Gnosticism such as that of Jonas.

39 Deakle states, "The absence of the speculative and mythological from his thought seems to preclude the categorization with the Gnostics" (29; cf. Bianchi, "Marcion," and Barabara Aland, "Marcion: Versuch einer neuen Interpretation," *Zeitschrift für Theologies und Kirche* 70 [1973]: 420-447).

40 Hoffmann, 155.

41 May writes, "Whereas the Gnostics appeal to Christian as well as extra-Christian texts and traditions, and in particular traced their special esoteric doctrines back to secret traditions, Marcion rejects any form of oral tradition and relies solely on writings associated with the name of Paul" ("Marcionism in Contemporary View," 146).

42 Irenaeus, *Adv. Haereses*, I. 27; Hippolytus, *Haereses*, X.19.

43 Blackman states, "If Marcion came to Rome already having learnt from Paul the distinction of the law and Grace, and already having rejected the Old Testament under a conviction of the absolute newness of the revelation in Christ, Cerdo's doctrine of two gods may well have been that complement which he needed, and Cerdo's lecture-room may have provided him with a stimulus to the clear expression of his theories" (69).

Irenaeus, Cerdo taught a dualism between a Demiurge and a God of love, very similar to Marcion's dualism. Could Cerdo have been a Gnostic and a teacher of Marcion? Scholars have generally answered negatively. Harnack argues that the Marcionite church always claimed Marcion as its founder and never Cerdo, though some of their doctrines were similar; therefore, Irenaeus and Hippolytus were wrong in linking Marcion with Cerdo.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, Deakle says that Marcion was not influenced by Cerdo in Rome because (1) Cerdo's existence is tenuous at best, (2) there exists the apparent perceived uniqueness of Marcion by both his followers and the heresiologists, and (3) sufficient evidence indicates that Marcion may have had heretical tendencies prior to his arrival at Rome.<sup>45</sup> Hoffmann agrees saying, "Thus while there can be no doubt that Marcion's career was linked by tradition from a very early date with that of Cerdo, there is no solid basis for adducing an historical relationship between the teaching of the two men from the tradition which Irenaeus has inherited."<sup>46</sup> In fact, almost nothing is known about Cerdo beyond what Irenaeus gives in *Adversus Haereses* (1.27.1; 3.4.3), though in my opinion, this lack of evidence is not sufficient enough to totally disclaim any link between the two; we must keep the option open.

At this point, it becomes important to investigate the differences and similarities between Marcion and Gnosticism in order to understand better what may or may not make Marcion a Gnostic. As we explore the similarities, we can only speak in general terms because any comparison of analogous elements will show important differences. The analogous elements between Marcion and Gnosticism can be briefly summarized as follows: (1) a Demiurge as

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44 Harnack, 19.

45 Deakle, 22-23.

46 Hoffmann, 42. In note 50, p. 42, Hoffmann quotes F. Legge, *Forerunners and Rivals of Christianity* (New York: Peter Smith, 1950), Vol. II, 203: "The inference is unavoidable that Marcion's views were original and that there were formed by a sort of centrifugal process; after rejecting in turn all heathen and Jewish elements, as well as most of the traditions which had already grown up in the Catholic Church."

creator and intermediate being; (2) a polemic against the OT and Judaism; (3) the dualism between matter (flesh) and spirit; (4) an unknown God who is absolute goodness as is opposed to the cosmos; (5) a negative attitude to this world; (6) a preoccupation with evil; (7) a tendency to view the cosmos in aeons; and (8) a docetic view of Christ. These elements are essential enough to the various gnostic systems to clearly put Marcion within the broad category of Gnosticism.<sup>47</sup>

Marcion, however, believed himself to be faithful to the teachings of Christ and Paul and, therefore, a Christian. The Christian elements within his teaching make Marcion different from the majority of the other Gnostics. Hoffmann points out significant areas in which Marcion's views can be distinguished from Gnosticism:

- (1) His teaching is free from the mythological speculation about the first principles, acosmic crisis, and cosmic descent.
- (2) For the Gnostics, salvation was "an adjunct of necessity of the acosmic crisis in the pleroma," but for Marcion, it was bound up in the nature of God and the plight of mankind.
- (3) For Marcion, the creator is not absolutely evil, like the Demiurge, but his justice and jealousy is malice compared to the supreme God.
- (4) Creation is not an act of *hubris* (cosmic speculation) but out of ignorance of the supreme God.
- (5) Marcion makes faith rather than knowledge the mode of redemption and the only appropriate response to revelation.
- (6) His Christology is not like the eclectic revealer-myths of the Gnostics, but a dichotomy between the unknown God and object of his revelation.
- (7) Marcion does not have a gnostic savior imparting secret wisdom, marking the way of the soul's ascent through the cosmos, but 'mystery of faith' exclusively in the goodness of God and not any 'perfection' inherent in mankind.<sup>48</sup>

Furthermore, Rudolph points out a difference in anthropology: "Marcion knows of no share of man in the supreme God; for him there is no affinity of essence between man and God

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<sup>47</sup> Jonas says, "Yet the anti-cosmic dualism as such, of which Marcion is the most uncompromising exponent, the idea of the unknown God opposed to the cosmos, the very conception of an inferior and oppressive creator and the consequent view of salvation as liberation from his power by an alien principle are so outstandingly gnostic that anyone who professed them in this historical environment must be counted as one of the Gnostics, not merely by way of classification but in the sense that the gnostic ideas that were abroad actually shaped his thinking" (137-138).

<sup>48</sup> Hoffmann, 175-179.

as prerequisite for salvation, as taught in Gnosis. Not only the body is evil but also the soul is infected by it, for it, too, comes from the demiurge."<sup>49</sup> In addition, in the realm of interpretation, Gnostics tended to interpret allegorically and Marcion literally.<sup>50</sup>

Although Marcion seems to have little in common with the Gnosticism of the Sethian or Valentinian type, his followers certainly move towards mainstream Gnosticism.<sup>51</sup> Marcion's followers constantly made changes to his text since Marcion had never forbidden it and may even have encouraged it.<sup>52</sup> Marcionites disagreed among themselves concerning the doctrine of God and about the number of divine principles. Marcion had two, his follower Apelles had one, and others had three or more. Apelles shifted Marcion's ditheism closer to gnostic monism with his "return to a single God, with the Demiurge and the God of the Old Testament beneath as angelic beings.... As such, Apelles provided a transition from the pure ditheism of Marcion to the speculative cosmology of Gnosticism."<sup>53</sup> Considerable disagreement arose among the Fathers over the details of Marcionite theology.

As previously mentioned, Marcion never thought of himself as unchristian or "sectarian."<sup>54</sup> Rather, his goal was to liberate Christianity from the bonds of false teaching by determining the correct scripture and establishing the true Church.<sup>55</sup> His conflict with the Church resulted from his understanding of Christ as the gracious redeemer who had abolished the Old

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49 Kurt Rudolf, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism* (San Francisco: Harper, 1987), 316.

50 Blackman, 87.

51 The majority of scholars would agree that Marcion's followers moved closer to Gnosticism than had Marcion. Deakle (43, note 1) notes one dissenting opinion from David L. Balas, "Marcion Revisited: A 'Post-Harnack' Perspective," in *Texts and Testaments: Critical Essays on the Bible and Early Church Fathers*, ed. W. Eugene March (San Antonio: Trinity Univ. Press, 1980), p. 100.

52 Harnack, 110.

53 Deakle, 50-53. Cf. May, Gerhard, "Marcion in Contemporary Views," 129-51.

54 Harnack, 16.

55 Harnack, with his high view of Marcion, offers that there is "no reason for doubting Marcion's subjective honesty, that is, his conviction that what he had done was right and proper. If he had been a swindler, more than one way would have been open to him to give his falsifications a high or even an absolute authority" (Ibid., 48).

Testament and its God. Taking Luke 6:43 as his key verse, Marcion believed that the Church had poured the old wine of Judaism (i.e. the Old Testament and its Just God) into the new wine skin of the gospel thus destroying the new message of the Good God. Marcion wanted to purge any Judaistic tendencies (concerning a Just God) from the Church which still equated the two Gods as one.<sup>56</sup> He believed himself to be the true interpreter of Paul's gospel and the Church to be incorrect. Nevertheless, the very fact that Marcion raised the ire of the Fathers (the proponents of "true" orthodoxy) should cause one to question his orthodoxy.

Important differences emerge as we compare Marcion's gnostic tendencies with position of the orthodox Church. Marcion became trapped within the tensions of law and gospel and created a dichotomy which Paul never intended there to be. This alone, though, would not be enough to label him as "unorthodox."<sup>57</sup> Jonas states that Marcion's most dangerous viewpoint concerned the antithesis of the Just God and the Good God because "it sunders and distributes to two mutually exclusive gods that polarity of justice and mercy whose very togetherness in one God motivates by its tension the whole dialectic of Pauline theology."<sup>58</sup> This is precisely the contention that many of the heresiologists had with Marcion. Irenaeus, for example, ridicules Marcion for his blasphemy of the God of the Old Testament, the only God who has revealed himself to humanity, attributing to God all forms of evil. Moreover, he criticizes Marcion's degradation of the humanity of Jesus (i.e. the nativity), and his disavowal of the teachings of the Apostles.<sup>59</sup> Tertullian's work, *Adversus Marcionem*, is devoted to refuting Marcion and to illuminating his errors (might we call them "unorthodoxies"?). Tertullian basically treats same themes as Irenaeus. In the first book, Tertullian argues that Marcion's Good God is no god at all.

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>57</sup> One would simply need to look at Martin Luther--who some might also label as "unorthodox"--with his dichotomy of law and grace.

<sup>58</sup> Jonas, 141.

<sup>59</sup> Irenaeus, *Adv. Haereses*, I.25.1.

The second book asserts that the Marcion's Just God is, in fact, the true God, only Marcion understands him in a distorted fashion. Book three shows that Jesus Christ is the Messiah of the Old Testament and the son of the Creator God. In books four and five Tertullian systematically refutes Marcion's interpretation of scripture, most significantly concerning the contentions he raises in books one through three. One could go on through the heresiologists illuminating Marcion's heterodoxy. The heresiologists viewed themselves as protectors of orthodoxy. Marcion's teaching, although it contained many Christian elements, was far enough away from the central beliefs of the emerging Church that he was labeled a dangerous opponent.<sup>60</sup>

Marcion's unorthodoxy did not leave a totally negative legacy in the early Church but a profound impact in many ways. May remarks that Marcion "aroused the forces of defense" concerning Christian foundations within the Catholic Church resulting in the formation of a canon, Rule of Faith, and ecclesiastical doctrines.<sup>61</sup> Blackman writes,

It was due to Marcion more than any other single person that the Church during one of the most formative periods of its history did not overlook the significance of Paul. It was largely due to the Pauline content of Marcion's New Testament that the Church received so many of Paul's Epistles into its own Canon.<sup>62</sup>

In conclusion, it should be evident that Marcion is not easily labeled as either Christian or Gnostic--he is a bit of both. The label, "quasi-Gnostic-Christian" does not adequately grasp all of Marcion's thought, but it includes the idea that Marcion has enough affinities with both Gnosticism and Christianity to be placed in both systems, though this placement may be on the fringes of the "orthodox." Hoffmann gives a good summary of the situation:

Marcion was familiar with gnostic interpretation of Paul and the gospels . . . this familiarity can only be compared to Paul's (similar) acquaintance with the motifs of gnostic and Hellenistic dualism: that is to say, it does not result in a systematic

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60 An interesting theme, beyond this paper but worthy of notice, is the impact of Marcion's ecclesiology upon the heresiologists contention against him.

61 May, "Marcion in Contemporary Views," 149.

62 Blackman, 110.

appropriation of gnostic themes, or in a coherent attempt to interpret the gospel in a such terms. Marcion's struggle with Paul's theology entailed struggling with the gnostic interpretation of Paul as well as with the emergent "deutero"-paulinism of the orthodox. But his resolution of the struggle was as little gnostic as "orthodox."<sup>63</sup>

The heresiologists desired Marcion and his followers to return to the orthodox position of the Great Church. They wrote to quell the heresy that was adrift from under the port of the Church, as Tertullian said, "I am sorry for thee, Marcion--thou has laboured in vain, for Christ Jesus in thy Gospel is mine also."<sup>64</sup>

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63 Hoffmann, 183-184.

64 Quoted by Wilson, 183.