

*Separatio Legis Et Evangelii: Marcionism And Tertullian's Monotheistic Critique*

by

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## Abstract

This thesis will attempt to gauge the accuracy of Tertullian's *Adversus Marcionem*, particularly in the area of theology. Sources other than Tertullian, mostly his fellow heresiologists, will be used to form a picture of Marcionite thought, against which I will compare Tertullian's representation in the *Adversus Marcionem*. From this comparison I hope to be able to shed some light on how accurate Tertullian is in his discussion of Marcionite theology. The thesis will focus mainly on books 1-3 of the *Adversus Marcionem*.

## List of Abbreviations Used

AH	Irenaeus, <i>Against Heresies</i>
AM	Tertullian, <i>Adversus Marcionem</i>
DA	<i>Dialogue of Adamantius</i>
<i>Pan.</i>	Epiphanius, <i>Panarion</i>
RH	Hippolytus, <i>Refutation of All Heresies</i>

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My parents and family provided constant support, financial and otherwise, and their assistance as well was indispensable to the completion of this project. I especially thank my mother and father for helping me out with the overdue bills or late rent cheques, more times than I can remember; I certainly could not have written this thesis without a roof over my head, which, many times, they kept there. I would also like to thank my beloved girlfriend Tiffany, who was made to endure whole days of my whining, fretting, and jitters as I faced the deadlines. For her to handle it without killing me was more than I can imagine; to go the extra mile and actually somehow calm me down was plain magic.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

It is often difficult to examine and assess the heretical traditions of the early Church. The proto-orthodox movement was swift in decrying these traditions, and the texts which were produced by it almost universally take a negative view, a partiality which is often openly acknowledged by the proto-orthodox authors. At the same time, primary writings from these traditions are often scarce. It is true that the orthodox sometimes outright banned or destroyed the writings of their opponents, but it is also the case that, as is often said, 'history is written by the victor'; that is, the orthodoxy preserved its own writings, including those dealing with heresy, but the heretical movements, which have lost their congregants, were likewise unable to preserve many of their own writings. All this leaves us with a less than ideal scenario, in which almost all of the extant sources dealing with heresy are preserved by inimical sources.

One of these sources is Tertullian's *Adversus Marcionem*; this text was preserved for us by an orthodox tradition which rejected Marcion but valued the works of Tertullian (ironically, Tertullian's own sect, Montanism, was also decried as a heresy, probably around the turn of the fifth century.) It is an openly hostile work, at times sarcastic and even mocking. It is also, by a wide margin, the most thorough analysis of Marcionism ever undertaken by the ancient heresiologists, and it remains the foremost primary text we have on the Marcionite movement. Many writers have taken the *Adversus Marcionem* largely at face value (including Adolf Harnack, whose monograph, *Marcion: Das Evangelium vom fremden Gott*, is probably the most influential modern analysis). This in itself is not a great error—as we will show, Tertullian's representation is largely accurate—but students of heresy must always be cautious about accepting information from inimical sources without careful analysis of their validity. This thesis then is an attempt to provide such an analysis, specifically on the subject of theology which, for Marcion, means an examination of his two Gods. Throughout the thesis I will refer to the God of the Old Testament as the Creator and the God of the New Testament as the Stranger, reflecting Marcionite practice. The Marcionites also referred to the two as the Just and the Good,

respectively. Philosophically minded writers often referred to the Creator as the Demiurge.

Tertullian addresses the *Adversus Marcionem* to Marcion directly, though he lived later than Marcion (they may, however, have been very briefly contemporaneous, by one or two years), and Marcion was already dead when he wrote his work. His choice to address his enemy directly is likely a matter of form, and Tertullian probably means for this treatise to be used against Marcionites contemporary with himself. While there is not enough time, between Marcion himself and Tertullian's representation of him, for large-scale changes in theology to emerge, keeping this distinction in mind I have aimed to compare Tertullian's treatise to his Marcionite contemporaries, and not solely to Marcion himself.

In form, I have divided my analysis into four main sections: the first two deal with the Creator, while the last two deal with the Stranger. The two chapters on each God deal with the God's 'nature' and 'activities'. Thus, the chapters on the Creator deal with 'Justice and Evil' and 'Creation', whereas the chapters on the Stranger deal with His 'Alien Nature' and 'Salvation'. These divisions closely follow the structure of the sixth section of Harnack's *Marcion*.

My method for each chapter is to consult as many sources as possible for Marcion, at first leaving Tertullian's treatment out of the discussion. With Tertullian laid aside, most of the sources lending information about Marcion are other heresiologists of the orthodox tradition. None of these is as lengthy or involved as the *Adversus Marcionem*, but a comparison of different sources can help us to reconstruct a likely image of Marcionite belief. Foremost among these orthodox heresiologists are Hippolytus (Rome, 170-235 CE), Irenaeus (Gaul, active c. 200 CE, slightly later than Tertullian) and Epiphanius (Salamis, c. 315-403 CE). None of these wrote an entire treatise on Marcion; rather, we find they include information on him in their compendiums of heretical faiths. Thus we find information about Marcion in Hippolytus' *Against all Heresies*, Irenaeus' *Against the Heresies*, and Epiphanius' *Panarion*. We also find some information in pseudepigraphic writings (such as III Corinthians) which appear to have been written against the Marcionites. We have also the information of the writers Ephrem (Syria, c. 306-373 CE) and Eznik



(Armenia, active c. 440 CE). Of 'primary' content actually written by Marcionites there is practically none, but there are a few works, such as the *Dialogues of Adamantius*, which claim to represent actual Marcionites.

I have also included, at points, comparisons to Gnostic Christianity, through sources derived from the Coptic corpus discovered at Nag Hammadi. The status of Marcion as a 'Gnostic' is a debated issue, with current scholarship generally agreeing that it is confusing at best to include Marcion in this already poorly-defined category. Marcion has in the past been considered a Gnostic, a trend which appears to have begun to reverse in response to Harnack, who treats him as an ultra-Pauline thinker and a kind of primitive Protestant (this itself has proven a tenuous designation). There can be no doubt, however, that Marcionites shared many ideas with the Gnostics, even if they lack its most distinctive characteristics (the salvific *gnosis* and the reclaiming of the divine 'sparks'). The Gnostic works will therefore be of some comparative use, though a degree of caution is necessary here due to the many differences between classical Gnosticism and Marcionite belief. Some helpful comparisons can be made also with Manichaeism and other Iranian dualist religions, but these will again be very general, serving to illustrate broad themes of dualism in the first few centuries CE.

Following this reconstruction I will move on to an analysis of Tertullian's claims in the *Adversus Marcionem*. As mentioned above, in the interest of maintaining objectivity, I have avoided all use of Tertullian in the 'reconstruction' of Marcionite theology. This includes the *Adversus Marcionem* but also Tertullian's other works with reference to Marcion, most significantly *De Carne Christi*, which deals with Marcionite docetism at length. I have also limited my conclusions, such that the final product is solely an analysis of the *Adversus Marcionem* and not Tertullian's views of Marcion generally. I do not bring in works like *De Carne Christi* in my conclusions regarding the accuracy of Tertullian's representation in the *Adversus Marcionem*, though they may be instructive at points in determining the *reason* for his representing Marcion this way or that. In general, the structure of each chapter, then, is to determine a likely picture of real Marcionite belief by comparison of sources other than Tertullian, and then to compare this picture to the

representation offered by Tertullian's *Adversus Marcionem*. Finally, my conclusion will restate the findings of each chapter and attempt to decide upon Tertullian's overall accuracy and the general trends in his representation.

A final note: My analysis will focus mainly on Tertullian's first three books, dealing with the Stranger, the Creator, and the Christ. These three books constitute the entirety of Tertullian's actual argumentative work against Marcion. His fourth and fifth books, while voluminous, are almost entirely exegetical in nature; they follow from the arguments made in the first three books, and are perhaps better seen as an appendix, in which Tertullian cites various Scripture verses in order to substantiate the claims he has already made in the first three books. Because the nuances of Tertullian's use of Scripture are by and large outside the scope of this thesis, and because his most important exegeses are already contained in books 1-3, references to books 4-5 will be scarce.

## Chapter 2: Tertullian and Marcion, Their Lives

### 2.1: Tertullian

Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus was active in Carthage in the late second and early third centuries CE. It is not precise to say that he is the first Latin Christian writer,<sup>1</sup> nevertheless his voluminous body of represents the earliest organized theological writing to be presented in Latin rather than Greek. His interests throughout his career provide a clear insight into contemporary discussions of the nature of prophecy, martyrdom, and particularly heresy in the early third century.

For such a renowned figure, however, there is a surprising lack of biographical information. The earliest reference from an external source is the brief mention of Tertullian in Jerome's *De Viris Illustribus*.<sup>2</sup> This account tells us that Tertullian was the son of a "centurio proconsularis," that he was a priest in the church at Carthage and that he lived to a "decrepit old age".<sup>3</sup> Nearly this entire account has since been brought into question. As Barnes notes,<sup>4</sup> the position of 'centurio proconsularis' does not appear to have existed at all. The claim that Tertullian was a priest is usually considered by scholarship as an invention of Jerome; Tertullian "never describes himself as ordained or appeals to his position as a priest in order to strengthen an argument. On the contrary, he twice classes himself among the laity."<sup>5</sup> Barnes also provides an alternative chronology to suggest that Tertullian may have not lived to old age; he may have done most of his writing as a young man and died before reaching advanced age.<sup>6</sup> Contributing to the confusion, a jurist by the name of Tertullianus who lived in Carthage at the time is sometimes conflated with the Christian writer; present scholarship debates the connection.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Timothy David Barnes, *Tertullian: A Historical and Literary Study* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971) 6-7.

<sup>2</sup> Barnes, *Tertullian*, 3.

<sup>3</sup> Jerome, "Lives of Illustrious Men," trans. Ernest Cushing Richardson, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. III, ed. Phillip Schaff, (New York: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1892), 53.

<sup>4</sup> Barnes, *Tertullian*, 11-12. He argues that Jerome makes this claim as a result of a misreading of Tertullian's *Apologeticum*.

<sup>5</sup> Barnes, *Tertullian*, 11.

<sup>6</sup> Barnes 54-56.

<sup>7</sup> Barnes, *Tertullian*, 22-29.

Most of these problems in tracing the biographical details for Tertullian seem to stem ultimately from an appraisal of his work. His apologies and defenses of Christianity against its opponents, both internal and external, suggest a man intimately familiar with and passionate for the Church. His insight and erudition, as well as his strict ethics, suggest a man of some age. His style of writing, fiery and at times surprisingly sarcastic, reminiscent of a Ciceronian courtroom oration, does seem to suggest that Tertullian was involved in legal proceedings. None of these conceptions appears to be true, but the traditional image presented by Jerome and others gives insight as to the later tradition's perception of Tertullian as a person.

The issue becomes somewhat more clear historically when we examine clues from Tertullian's own writing. Though he rarely waxes biographical, there are a few points that give us some help. Tertullian appears to have been born a pagan; hence in his *Apologeticum*, addressing pagans, he writes "We are of your stock and nature: men are made, not born, Christians."<sup>8</sup> His early works<sup>9</sup> focused on discussions of various doctrinal and ethical positions of the proto-orthodox church of Rome<sup>10</sup> and the defense of Christianity from persecution and mockery by pagans; his monumental *Apologeticum* is the best representation of this tendency. As his attention shifts toward attacking heresy, his personal beliefs also undergo a transformation. As Tertullian begins to be swayed by Montanism, the 'New Prophecy,' its effects upon his work become more and more noticeable.<sup>11</sup> In 207, the *Adversus Marcionem* as we have it is finished, and Tertullian converts to Montanism sometime around 208.<sup>12</sup> Interestingly, his zeal for correcting heretics becomes even greater as his personal theological distance from the Church of Rome increases; I will discuss some possible reasons for this below. The remainder of Tertullian's writing life is devoted to the denouncement of heresies, all of which he considered

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<sup>8</sup> Tertullian, "Apology," trans. Rev. S. Thelwall, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. III, ed. Phillip Schaff, (Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885), 18.4.

<sup>9</sup> The most widely-accepted chronology of Tertullian's works is given by Adolf Harnack, *Die Chronologie der Altchristlichen Litteratur*, II, Leipzig, 1904, pp. 256-296. Harnack developed this chronology based on inter-textual references and the development of Tertullian's Montanist leanings.

<sup>10</sup> For instance, *De Baptismo* and *Ad Uxorem*.

<sup>11</sup> Barnes, *Tertullian*, 130-142.

<sup>12</sup> Philip Carrington, *The Early Christian Church, Volume II: The Second Christian Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), 428.

as a single general problem: the fruits of the perverse mind which ceaselessly questions God's provision, especially on the nature of evil.<sup>13</sup>

Tertullian favoured simple arguments from Scripture in his writing, which is clearly addressed to a large audience. He considered pagan philosophy to be alien to Christianity, and the cause and substance of all the varied forms of Christian heresy. Pagan philosophy engendered all of the spurious questions which led the people away from faith in God:

Indeed heresies are themselves instigated by philosophy. From this source came the [Gnostic] Aeons, and I know not what infinite forms, and the trinity of man in the system of Valentinus, who was of Plato's school. From the same source came Marcion's better god, with all His tranquility; he came of the Stoics... The same subject matter is discussed over and over again by the heretics and the philosophers; the same arguments are involved. Whence comes evil? Why is it permitted? What is the origin of man? And in what way does he come?<sup>14</sup>

As a result, Tertullian chooses to base his arguments solely on the Scripture, handed down from reliable sources: Christ and the prophets. The Scripture provides clear answers and guards its readers against the temptations of philosophy and heresy. We see this assurance in the *Adversus Marcionem*: "*Deum nos a prophetis et a Christo, non a philosophis nec ab Epicuro erudimur.*"<sup>15</sup> In his famous question, "What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem?"<sup>16</sup> Tertullian drew a line; the Christian faith is founded on revealed Scripture and the wisdom of the cross; it is the antidote to heresy, the sickness of mind brought on by overfamiliarity with pagan philosophy.

Tertullian is especially passionate when he is attacking the enemies of the church. His style is methodical throughout, systematically aiming to dismantle the arguments of his opponents and prove the validity of church doctrine. Moreover, his zeal expresses itself in more direct ways: throughout his entire career, Tertullian's work is shot through with startling vitriol, withering abuse, and acerbic sarcasm which often breaches outright hyperbole. In the opening pages of the *Adversus*

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<sup>13</sup> Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem*, trans. Ernest Evans (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972) 1.2. Referred to henceforth as *AM*.

<sup>14</sup> Tertullian, "*The Prescription Against Heretics*" trans. Rev. S. Thelwall, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. III, ed. Phillip Schaff (Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885), ch. 7.

<sup>15</sup> *AM*, 2.16.

<sup>16</sup> Tertullian, *Prescription*, ch. 7.

*Marcionem*, for instance, he describes the inhabitants of Marcion's homeland of Pontus:

They carve up their fathers' corpses along with mutton, to gulp down at banquets. If any die in a condition not good for eating, their death is a disgrace. Women also have lost the gentleness, along with the modesty, of their sex. They display their breasts, they do their house-work with battle-axes, they prefer fighting to matrimonial duty.<sup>17</sup>

Tertullian spared Marcion himself none of his famous attacks. Marcion ("more uncouth than a Scythian, more unsettled than a Wagon-dweller, more uncivilized than a Massagete, with more effrontery than an Amazon... a wild animal more acceptable to philosophers than to Christians"<sup>18</sup>) was the greatest enemy the church had ever faced, the "first-born of Satan."<sup>19</sup> His impious questioning into the nature of evil had driven him to the heights of absurdity; he mangled the gospels, he questioned the Christhood, even the body, of Jesus. His teachings drew the faithful away from salvation, causing them to despise their Creator. The insult is grievous, even maddening to Tertullian, and he lashes out at times with genuine anger. It is important to keep in mind that Tertullian's *Adversus Marcionem* is not an austere theological treatise; there is much at stake for Tertullian personally, and, as is clear from the text, the subject evokes real emotion.

Tertullian's Montanism can give us some insight into why this was such a personal battle. Montanism arose in Phrygia around 170,<sup>20</sup> when a certain Montanus claimed to have received prophetic visions. Soon two women, Prisca and Maximilla, followed suit. As its common name suggests, 'The New Prophecy' focused on the ongoing revelation of the Paraclete to the living Christian church, often through ecstatic possession. Though Eusebius would later describe the Montanist prophets

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<sup>17</sup> *AM*, 1.1.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Irenaeus, "Against Heresies," trans. Alexander Roberts and William Rambaut, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. I, ed. Phillip Schaff (Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885). 3.3.4. Referred to henceforth as *AH*.

<sup>20</sup> Barnes, *Tertullian*, 131.

as inspired by devils,<sup>21</sup> the sect spread widely and the Montanist community was quite strong in Carthage during Tertullian's life.<sup>22</sup>

Montanist thought introduced a rigorist ethic to Christian life, often arguing for stricter adherence to such institutions as fasting and marriage; hence in his Montanist period we see Tertullian arguing for single marriage and opposing the view that remarriage is permissible upon the death of one of the partners.<sup>23</sup> He also argues that a Christian who chooses to wear a pagan military garland is essentially an idolater, and that even if one is compelled to do so, one should instead refuse the garland and accept martyrdom.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, martyrdom figures large in Montanist thought. The emphasis on an uncompromising fulfillment of Christian codes of conduct hardened a person against weakness in the face of compulsion; as Carrington writes, "Life was to become a system of training for martyrdom."<sup>25</sup> The life and death of a martyr are themselves an expression of prophecy; as Barnes writes, "The Paraclete will speak through them at their trial and aid them in their suffering and death."<sup>26</sup> Taking the opposite extreme from the Gnostic Basilides, who argued that one can deny one's faith to avoid persecution as long as one has personal conviction,<sup>27</sup> Tertullian argued that one should not seek to avoid persecution. Rather, a person should rejoice that he has been chosen to provide an example of faithfulness to others, and that by his actions he will be absolved of all sin and welcomed into the kingdom of heaven.<sup>28</sup>

We see these views of martyrdom in the account of the martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas, who suffered in Carthage in the third century. There has been some speculation that Tertullian himself edited the account, but this is a debated issue.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Eusebius, *Historia Ecclesiae*, trans. Kirsopp Lake (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926), 5.16-7-9.

<sup>22</sup> Barnes, *Tertullian*, 131.

<sup>23</sup> Tertullian, "On Monogamy", trans. Rev. S. Thelwall, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. IV, ed. Phillip Schaff (Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885), 1.1.

<sup>24</sup> Barnes, *Tertullian*, 134.

<sup>25</sup> Carrington, *Early Christian Church*, vol. II, 430.

<sup>26</sup> Barnes, *Tertullian*, 182. See also Carrington, *Early Christian Church*, vol. II, 427.

<sup>27</sup> Barnes, *Tertullian*, 167.

<sup>28</sup> Barnes, *Tertullian*, 173-174.

<sup>29</sup> Brent Shaw, "The Passion of Perpetua", *Past and Present*, 139 (1993): 30. The Ante-Nicene Fathers collection, from which I quote from the *Passion*, below, considers Tertullian to be the author.

In any case, the account gives a clear example of martyrdom as it was understood in the Carthaginian Montanist environment. Receiving inspiration from the Paraclete, the martyrs dream prophetic dreams while they await their glory.<sup>30</sup> In the arena, a young fighter cannot bring himself to deal Perpetua the killing blow; “she herself placed the wavering right hand of the youthful gladiator to her throat.”<sup>31</sup> Behind this detail we see the Montanist exhortation to hold firm to the faith, even to welcome death when one is faced with compulsion to apostatise. The text concludes,

O most brave and blessed martyrs! O truly called and chosen unto the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ! whom whoever magnifies, and honours, and adores, assuredly ought to read these examples for the edification of the Church, not less than the ancient ones, so that new virtues may testify that one and the same Holy Spirit is always operating even until now...<sup>32</sup>

Thus, we can conclude that Tertullian, influenced as he already is by Montanism during the time of the writing of the *Adversus Marcionem*, is primarily concerned with the gifts of the Paraclete, which establish a continuous relationship from the early history of the Church to the Tertullian’s own time. The Paraclete is the author of the early Church’s Scriptures and standards of behaviour. Moreover, the inspiration of the Paraclete is active in the present; the community receives from it the guidelines of scriptural exegesis, as well as new prophecies in varied forms, including ecstatic possession and the words and actions of martyrs.

Marcion and other heretics, then, are not simply leading Christians away from true faith; they are attempting (ultimately, unsuccessfully) to undo the will of God through the perversion of the revelation of the Paraclete. This is accomplished primarily through a mutilation of sacred texts. Barnes writes, “The heretics reject part of the Scriptures and pervert the sense of what they accept to suit themselves.”<sup>33</sup> Their impious questioning, born of pagan philosophy, causes them to demand answers for the greatest mysteries; if, as is common, there is a straightforward answer to be found in the Scriptures, heretics reject that part of the

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<sup>30</sup> Tertullian, *The Passion of the Holy Martyrs Perpetua and Felicitas*, trans. Rev. R.E. Wallace, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. IV, ed. Phillip Schaff (Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885), 2.3.

<sup>31</sup> Tertullian, *Passion*, 6.4.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Barnes, *Tertullian*, 65.



Scripture as false, giving the impression that the Scriptures do not address the problem. Seeking to fill the 'void' they have thus artificially created, they import philosophy to cover the gap, and the result is a nonsensical combination of mutilated Scripture and alien philosophy, which serves only to pervert the faithful.

The error of heresy, in short, is a matter of failing to find, or deliberately ignoring, the answers provided by Scripture and by the exegesis of learned orthodox Christians. Heretics cannot therefore be allowed to use the Scripture, because they will not use it appropriately or completely. Their arguments will never be valid,<sup>34</sup> yet they continue to insist on their truncated and altered version of the texts in argument, such that their opponents do not have the resources to fully address the claims of the heretics. As Barnes writes, heretics "impute to their opponents their own dishonest tampering with the sacred text."<sup>35</sup>

Marcion's tampering with the Scriptures has left him in precisely this position; the result is his *Antitheses*, paired verses from the Old and New Testaments which supposedly display irreconcilable contrasts in the actions of the divine, suggesting either a fickleness in the Creator which is incompatible with divinity, or the presence of two distinct Gods. Marcion has failed to recognize the answers given by Scripture and has instead supplied his own answer, the nonsensical division of the divine into two separate beings. Tertullian has many responses to this single general claim, which I will analyze in detail below. His favourite response, however, is one which relies solely on Scripture: not the hacked and mangled Scripture presented by Marcion, but the fullness of the revealed texts given by the Paraclete for the guidance of the faithful. From these texts Tertullian argues that the one God acts through contrasts.<sup>36</sup> Is the world not composed of contrasting elements? Is it really impossible for God to mete out punishment to the wicked and to reward the good, given that through their free will humans choose their fate? In the crucifixion, did God not both die and continue to live eternally? When one examines the Scriptures – that is, all of the Scriptures – one finds that the Paraclete has given

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<sup>34</sup> Barnes, *Tertullian*, 65.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *AM*, 2.17.

ready answers to anyone who is willing to read honestly. The practice of philosophy is not mandated, as heretics claim, by the lack of solid answers in the text; it is they who are perverting the text, expressly devising an excuse to import dangerous pagan philosophy into Christian thought.

Given his incipient commitment to Montanism, it is clear, then, that Tertullian, is faced with a personal and serious problem in Marcion, and it is easy to see why we so often witness his (very real) anger in the *Adversus Marcionem*. The Christian Church relies on the Paraclete for guidance; it is for the Church the source of all truth and knowledge. The prophecies and inspirations of the Paraclete safeguard the Church; she need never turn to philosophy for the answers to her questions – philosophy which is itself a mere breath away from heresy. Marcion, claiming to be a Christian, represents the Scripture as flawed; he questions the validity of the inspiration of the Paraclete, that source from which came the gospels, the prophecies which continue in the present, and even the actions of the martyrs, whose steadfast reliance on God alone serves as an example to the entire Church. Marcion, in short, insidiously and intentionally causes Christians to doubt the true faith, bestowed by the Spirit and defended with blood, and to accept nonsensical pagan trickery instead, at the risk of their very souls. Tertullian cannot stand this; the *Adversus Marcionem* is his line in the sand.

## 2.2: Marcion

Marcion's own history is a far less certain matter. The sources generally agree that he was from the town of Sinope in the north of Pontus (the southern coast of the Black Sea.)<sup>37</sup> His father was apparently a fairly wealthy shipowner<sup>38</sup> and possibly a bishop, as we have from Epiphanius, below. Epiphanius gives us a fairly detailed biography. Since it is the only detailed biography of Marcion available from the primary sources, I will quote most of it; however some caution should be exercised here, as the lion's share of the details of this biography do not appear in any other source, so the accuracy of the account has been recently called into

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<sup>37</sup> Epiphanius, *Panarion*, trans. Frank Williams (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994), 1.3. Referred to henceforth as *Pan*. See also *AM*, 1.1.

<sup>38</sup> This is asserted by Rhodon and by Tertullian, who makes several references to Marcion as a *nauceros* throughout the course of the *Adversus Marcionem*.

question by Bart Ehrman and others.<sup>39</sup> Nonetheless, here is the biography as presented by Epiphanius:

Marcion, the founder of the Marcionites, taking his cue from Cerdo, appeared in the world as a great serpent himself and became the head of a school by deceiving a throng of people in many ways, even to this day... He was a native of Pontus—I mean of Helenopontus and the city of Sinope, as is commonly said of him. In early life he supposedly practiced celibacy, for he was a hermit and the son of a bishop of our holy catholic church. But in time he unfortunately became acquainted with a virgin, cheated the virgin of her hope and degraded both her and himself, and for seducing her was excommunicated by his own father... [U]nable to bear the scorn of the populace he fled his city and arrived at Rome itself after the death of Hyginus, the bishop of Rome. (Hyginus was ninth in succession from the apostles Peter and Paul.) Meeting the elders who were still alive and had been taught by the disciples of the apostles, he asked for admission to communion, and no one would grant it to him. Finally, seized with jealousy since he could not obtain high rank besides entry into the church, he reflected and took refuge in the sect of that fraud, Cerdo. And he began—at the very beginning, as it were, and as though at the starting-point of the questions at issue—to put this question to the elders of that time: “Tell me, what is the meaning of, 'Men do not put new wine into old bottles, or a patch of new cloth unto an old garment; else it both taketh away the fullness, and agreeth not with the old. For a greater rent will be made.'” On hearing this the good and most sacred elders and teachers of God's holy church gave him the appropriate and fitting answer, and equably explained, "Child, 'old bottles' means the hearts of the Pharisees and scribes, which had grown old in sins and not received the proclamation of the gospel... "No," Marcion retorted, "there are other explanations besides these." And since they were unwilling to receive him, he asked them plainly, "Why will you not receive me?" "We cannot without your worthy father's permission," was their answer. "There is one faith and one concord, and we cannot oppose our excellent colleague, your father." Becoming jealous then and roused to great anger and arrogance Marcion made the rent, founding his own sect and saying, "I am going to tear your church, and make a rent in it forever." He did indeed make a rent of no small proportions, not by rending the church but by rending himself and his converts.<sup>40</sup>

Sorting out the truth from this biography is tentative at best. Marcion was indeed familiar with a certain Cerdo, a Syrian Gnostic who was to be his teacher.<sup>41</sup> Of Cerdo even less is known than of Marcion, though Irenaeus suggests that the dualism particular to Marcionism is transmitted through Cerdo. The heresiologists

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<sup>39</sup> Bart Ehrman, *Lost Christianities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 104.

<sup>40</sup> *Pan.*, 42.1.1-42.2.8.

<sup>41</sup> *AH*, 27.1. Reported also by Tertullian, as we will see below.

generally treat Cerdo simply as Marcion's informant, and therefore almost nothing is preserved of his own theological ideas as distinct from Marcionism.

The story about the virgin is likely either entirely fabricated or allegorical,<sup>42</sup> with the 'virgin' being a reference to the Church, which Marcion violated with his heresy. The detail that Marcion arrived in Rome after the death of Pope Hyginus, if true, places his arrival sometime shortly after 142 CE.

There is no certainty about Epiphanius' information on the alleged meeting between Marcion and the elders on the issue of new wine in old bottles; clearly, a discussion of this parable would have foreshadowed Marcion's particular theological argument, that the message of Jesus was wholly new, unrelated to the Old Testament, and thus indicative of another God. Epiphanius' report of the claim of the elders that "There is one faith and one concord" is likewise a significant detail, representing Marcion as upsetting the general concord of the proto-orthodox tradition with his own new faith.

The above is essentially all we have in terms of a biography of this most influential heretic, perhaps the first to introduce a large-scale schism in the orthodox Church of Rome. The truth or falsity of nearly all of it remains uncertain, with the exception of Marcion's homeland, his teacher, and perhaps his nautical history and the substantial donation given to the Church upon his arrival. While Marcion's personal history has been largely lost to time, we will see that the legacy of his theology and the rift that it caused are potent memories even for writers long removed from him in time. The sparse biography therefore cannot give us a true picture of the man. Potently influential, he was as much a curse to the orthodoxy as he was the revealer of a higher God to his own people. To truly see who Marcion was and why he was so massively important, we turn our focus now to the analysis of his theology, which Marcion developed from the concept of new wine in old skins into a Marcionite Church which spanned four centuries.

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<sup>42</sup> As argued by Ehrman, *Lost Christianities*, 104.

## Chapter 3: The Creator, His Nature: Justice And Evil

### 3.1: Justice

Central to the appraisal of Marcion's account of the Creator is the question of justice and evil. The traditional opinion, established by Harnack, holds that Marcion believed the Creator, identical with the God of the Old Testament, to be a harshly retributive God and therefore primarily a God of justice. In this view, the Creator is deficient in that He lacks the abundance of love and mercy which characterize the Stranger. He has His Law, which He enforces with impeccable accuracy, and this judgement of souls based on their adherence to His laws constitutes His primary activity and therefore His defining nature. This nature is opposed entirely by the Stranger. The Stranger, represented within the created world by Jesus, offers a free gift of salvation to all, regardless of merit; the Stranger rescues human souls from the unforgiving demands of the Creator's Law, and the imperfection of His material world.

We can see in this general summary of the standard position on Marcion that while the Creator is seen to possess many negative qualities—primarily a lack of mercy, an excess of anger, an unfair desire to punish humans for their failure to fulfill an immensely restrictive and perhaps even impossible Law—the Creator is Himself not seen to be actually evil. Quite to the contrary, He is characteristically resolute in His desire for 'the good.' Indeed, the unflagging integrity of this resolve is His characteristic flaw, the catalyst for the unhappy human situation that the Stranger manifests in the world in order to resolve. The Creator is thus decidedly *not*, in this view, essentially evil, but is in fact somewhat too resolved that humans should behave according to His divine mandate. We resolve with an image of the Creator as a harsh, legalistic punisher, Who is supplanted by a God of mercy, Who rescues the faithful. Such a view obviously owes much to the Pauline language of justification by works and by faith, upon which the Protestant Reformation built so much of its doctrinal argumentation. This is not necessarily a coincidence.

This view of Marcion's Creator became standard through the work of Adolf Harnack in his treatise on Marcion, *Marcion: Das Evangelium vom fremden Gott*. The most serious and intensive modern study of Marcion and his influence, Harnack's

*Marcion* influenced a generation of scholarship and cemented the above view in the academic world almost as a shorthand for the tension which spurred Marcion's entire theological enterprise. Sebastian Moll writes,

Marcion's dualism forms without a doubt the centre of his doctrine. The nature of this dualism does not seem to give rise to much doubt, either, ever since Harnack established his idea that Marcion distinguishes between a just and a good God, and thereby also established a scholarly consensus which lasted for almost a century.<sup>43</sup>

Any scholar of Marcion is indebted to Harnack's ground-breaking work, but as we will see shortly, some of his conclusions regarding Marcion's theological problematic and its resolution have been questioned in recent scholarship. Nowhere is this skepticism more apparent than in more recent appraisals of Harnack's position on the subject of the 'justice' of the Creator. Harnack has been criticized for his stance which holds that Marcion was the 'first reformer,'<sup>44</sup> a strict Pauline thinker and biblical scholar who emphasized, just as Luther would fourteen centuries later, the apparent Pauline antinomianism, the juxtaposition of works and faith, and the importance of unearned grace, as he found them in the epistles. Many have suggested that on this point in particular, Harnack misleadingly reads his own theological premises into a historical figure far removed from himself. This leads him to make fairly sweeping claims regarding Marcion's apparent 'protestant' message, as we read in Harnack's *History of Dogma*:

It was only after the failure of his attempts at reform that he founded churches of his own, in which brotherly equality, freedom from all ceremonies, and strict evangelical discipline were to rule. Completely carried away with the novelty, uniqueness and grandeur of the Pauline Gospel of the grace of God in Christ, Marcion felt that all other conceptions of the Gospel, and especially its union with the Old Testament religion, was opposed to, and a backsliding from, the truth. He accordingly supposed that it was necessary to make the sharp antitheses of Paul, Law and gospel, wrath and grace, works and faith, flesh and spirit, sin and righteousness, death and life, that is the Pauline criticism of the Old Testament religion, the foundation of his religious views, and to refer them to two principles, the righteous and wrathful God of the Old Testament, Who is

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<sup>43</sup> Sebastian Moll, *The Arch-Heretic Marcion (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament, 2010)*, 47.

<sup>44</sup> Moll, *Marcion*, 4.

at the same time identical with the Creator of the world, and the God of the Gospel, quite unknown before Christ, Who is only love and mercy.<sup>45</sup>

Harnack here presents Marcion as a kind of pure Pauline thinker, and his characterization is at points even somewhat misleading in order to cement this view. Marcionite churches, for instance, did not abolish ritual; they performed the Eucharist, as Tertullian reports,<sup>46</sup> with somewhat of a smirk, as he illustrates the paradox of condemning the material world while using its elements in the performance of sacred ritual. Harnack discounts the possibility that Marcion had any philosophical influence,<sup>47</sup> a claim which we will find throughout this thesis to be essentially untenable. Harnack's Marcion is therefore framed as just slightly too 'Protestant' to be taken at face value.

The above being taken into consideration, however, it is certainly not the case that Harnack's position on the nature of the Creator was simply manufactured *in toto* and that justice did not play some role in actual Marcionite conceptions of the Creator. Harnack may overemphasize this element of the system, but that these questions are present in the ancient sources, there can be no doubt. It is therefore necessary to reckon both with the arguments for the justice of the Creator as well as arguments suggesting that the Creator is Himself evil by nature, arguments which Harnack himself grudgingly acknowledges, though he simultaneously attempts to downplay their significance to Marcion.<sup>48</sup>

### 3.2: Evil

Sebastian Moll argues that Marcion himself conceived of a pure dualism of a good God and an evil God, and that speculation on a 'just' God is a feature of later Marcionite thought.<sup>49</sup> He finds evidence for this in the *Letter of Ptolemy to Flora*. In this epistle, which is first recorded in Epiphanius' *Panarion* but which may have a much earlier date,<sup>50</sup> the Gnostic Ptolemy refutes both the orthodox claim that the author of the Law is God the Father, as well as apparently Marcionite claims that the

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<sup>45</sup> Adolf Harnack, *History of Dogma*, vol. I, trans. N. Buchanan (Boston, Little, 1901), 266.

<sup>46</sup> *AM*, 1.14.

<sup>47</sup> Harnack, *History*, 68-69.

<sup>48</sup> Harnack, *History*, 268.

<sup>49</sup> Moll, *Marcion*, 55.

<sup>50</sup> Moll, *Marcion*, 48.

Law was given by the devil. Ptolemy refutes the first point by arguing that the Law cannot have been given by the highest God, because “it is secondary, being imperfect and in need of completion by another, containing commandments alien to the nature and thought of such a God.”<sup>51</sup> He then submits a second position, which Moll connects to Marcionism, that the Law was given not by a God obsessed with justice and retribution, but one *Who is by His very nature evil*: “one cannot impute the Law to the injustice of the opposite God, for it [the Law] is opposed to injustice.”<sup>52</sup> Thus, the Law seems to occupy a sort of middle ground between the two Gods; it is demonstrably not perfect enough to be the creation of a perfectly good God, nor is it base enough to assign it to the authorship of a being who is completely evil, apparently the Marcionite Creator, who is actually referred to as a *devil*. Ptolemy’s solution therefore is to argue for the presence of three Gods: a good God, an evil God, and a ‘just’ God, who gives the Law and demands that it be upheld, but does not know mercy or love:

For if the Law was not ordained by the perfect God himself, as we have already taught you, nor by the devil, a statement one cannot possibly make, the legislator must be some one other than these two. In fact, He is the Demiurge and maker of this universe and everything in it; and because He is essentially different from these two and is between them, He is rightly given the name, intermediate.<sup>53</sup>

Ptolemy himself does not appear to be a Marcionite; rather, Moll argues that his response is evidence for the original Marcionite dualism, to which Ptolemy is compelled to respond by positing a lawgiver. Moll’s position is that it is not feasible to suggest that Ptolemy is responding to a tradition which already considers the Demiurge to be just; this would make his own argument redundant, and place him squarely in the camp of the Marcionites, one of the groups he is confronting. Moll writes, “If Marcion had already proclaimed a just Demiurge / Lawgiver, as the Harnack-legacy maintains, Ptolemy’s counter argument would lose its entire purpose. Ptolemy would come up with a figure already proved by Marcion.”<sup>54</sup> Moll

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<sup>51</sup> *The Letter of Ptolemy to Flora*. It is included in *Pan.*, 33.3-33.7.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Moll, *Marcion*, 49.



goes on to illustrate through more early sources that the original Marcionite position is most accurately conceived of as a simple dualism of a good God and an evil God. The arguments which hold the Creator to be just as opposed to simply evil grew over time, and multiple answers were given as the tradition developed. Nonetheless we have some solid evidence here that early Marcionism was less concerned with the juxtaposition of goodness and justice as it was with that of simple good and evil. Indeed, this simplifies matters, as the one defining characteristic of Marcionism throughout its life was that the Creator and the Stranger were *ultimately opposed*; there was no possibility of comparison between the two (as could be imagined if one were good and the other just, since justice is generally considered good). Since the Stranger's most defining characteristic is His goodness, which transcends all mortal goodness,<sup>55</sup> it would stand to reason that at least in its original iteration the God who stands opposed to the Creator has an evil nature Himself.

### 3.3: Justice and Evil

While the above is useful in attempting to recreate Marcion's original theology, it is also beneficial to a reconstruction of Marcionism as it existed during Tertullian's time. The *Letter of Ptolemy* emphasizes a problem within Marcionism as a dualist system, with a Law which has an ambiguous status as neither wholly good nor wholly evil.<sup>56</sup> The material world, as we will see below, was regarded by Marcionites throughout the development of the tradition as inherently evil. Harnack writes, "This world, a product of the just World-Creator and evil matter, is an evil nature."<sup>57</sup> Despite Harnack, one can certainly argue that a Creator Who is so closely involved with and productive of this evil material reality would Himself have an evil nature. The Law, however, is not wholly evil. The question is then naturally asked: how can this God, demonstrated as evil by his role in the Creation, also be responsible for the giving of the Law? As Moll argues, the problematic was resolved, over time, in different ways: one was an emphasis on the evil nature of matter,

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<sup>55</sup> Adolf Harnack, *Marcion: The Gospel of the Alien God*, trans. John E. Steely and Lyle D. Bierma (Eugene, Wipf and Stock, 1990), 81.

<sup>56</sup> Moll, *Marcion*, 55.

<sup>57</sup> Harnack, *Marcion*, 71.

allowing it to bear some of the responsibility for the unhappy state of the material world. Moll writes,

That the world was evil was the one unifying belief of all Marcionites at all times, and in order to explain the origin of this evil, it seemed only logical to assume an evil Creator as the cause of this status, in accordance with the idea that only a bad tree brings forth bad fruit. Once they went down that road, however, they had to face the conundrum how the Law could have been given by an evil God, a problem which already compelled Ptolemy to introduce a third figure. Another solution presented itself from Platonic philosophy, as Ephrem Syrus remarks. The Creator could be just and therefore the Law could be just as well, if He had to use already existing (evil) matter to create the world. Thus the Creator was absolved from being responsible for the world's status.<sup>58</sup>

The tradition underwent a number of what Moll calls 'deformations,' wherein the precise nature of the interactions between goodness, evil, and justice were discussed. We see the culmination of this tradition in the *Dialogue of Adamantius*, in which the Marcionite Megethius argues for the existence of three Gods: the good God of the Christians, the just God of the Jews, who is both lawgiver and Creator, and an evil God of the pagans.<sup>59</sup> Later, this view is challenged by a different Marcionite, Markus, who argues for only two principles, one good and the other evil.<sup>60</sup> Moll argues that this could be evidence of a "renaissance of original Marcionite ideas";<sup>61</sup> it is in any case an indication that questions of goodness, evil, and justice in the divinities remained divisive topics for the Marcionite community well beyond Tertullian's time. Tertullian, however, is addressing his text directly to Marcion personally, and at many points he synthesizes what appear to be distinct and separate Marcionite traditions in order to maintain the singularity of his argumentative focus. As such we cannot necessarily assume that ambiguity on the part of Tertullian and his contemporary heresiologists represents actual distortion of information on their part. Rather, we must keep in mind that there were numerous answers to these questions given by numerous different Marcionites,

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Pseudo-Origen, *The Dialogues of Adamantius*, trans. Daniel John Mahar, 2000, 1.2, 1.9. Referred to henceforth as *DA*.

<sup>60</sup> *DA*, 2.1.

<sup>61</sup> Moll, *Marcion*, 54.

which could have contributed to a less cohesive representation of their movement in the orthodox sources.

This is certainly the case for Irenaeus, who was active only shortly before Tertullian. In Irenaeus's account of Marcionite theology, we find that the Creator is discussed as both evil and just. In his introduction to the doctrines of Cerdo and Marcion, Irenaeus writes,

[Cerdo] taught that the God proclaimed by the Law and the prophets was not the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. For the former was known, but the latter unknown; while the one also was righteous (*dikaaios*), but the other benevolent. Marcion of Pontus succeeded him, and developed his doctrine. In doing so, he advanced the most daring blasphemy against Him who is proclaimed as God by the Law and the prophets, declaring Him to be the author of evils, to take delight in war, and even to be contrary to Himself.<sup>62</sup>

Irenaeus does not specify how Marcion was able to simply 'develop' a theology of a just God into one in which the God is inherently evil. It is clear, however, that Irenaeus does not wish for us to assume that Marcion simply changed the just God into an evil, unjust one. Rather, he indicates that criticism of Creator's Law remains a fixture of Marcionite argumentation, and he devotes an entire chapter to precisely this point,<sup>63</sup> arguing against Marcionites who claim scriptural basis for their views regarding what seems to them to be a harshly inflexible and ineffective Law. Thus, Irenaeus appears to be representing different traditions; he specifies that the one is attributed to Cerdo and the other to Marcion, but this is hard to verify given the dearth of sources on Cerdo and the tendency to portray him simply as an influence on Marcion. In either case we again have here clear evidence of multiple approaches to this issue within the Marcionite tradition.

Irenaeus goes on to insinuate that Marcionites hold that Jesus was sent to overthrow the Law. The Marcionites have raised an argument that it was absurd that Jesus should have been rebuked for healing lepers on the Sabbath; such devotion to the proper observance of the Law at the expense of the merciful compassion offered by Jesus seems to illustrate precisely the tension between goodness and justice. In

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<sup>62</sup> *AH*, I.27.1-2.

<sup>63</sup> *AH*, 4.8.

response, Irenaeus claims that the work of Jesus was to illustrate the true nature of the Law,

For the Law commanded them to abstain from every servile work, that is, from all grasping after wealth which is procured by trading and by other worldly business; but it exhorted them to attend to the exercises of the soul, which consist in reflection, and to addresses of a beneficial kind for their neighbours' benefit. And therefore the Lord reprov'd those who unjustly blamed Him for having healed upon the Sabbath-days. For He did not make void, but fulfilled the Law.<sup>64</sup>

This argument therefore presupposes a situation in which the mercy of Jesus is allowed to naturally inform and transform the stern demands of the Law. Such a distinction seems to suggest quite clearly that Irenaeus was responding to the Marcionite problematic of justice and goodness, as described above and emphasized by Harnack. Other sources also indicate the Marcionite position that among the primary activities of Jesus was to vanquish the Creator's harsh Law; these include the *Dialogue of Adamantius*, where it is written quite plainly that "The Christ destroyed the Law of the Creator."<sup>65</sup> These arguments apparently stood in alongside broader arguments, represented for instance by Ephrem and Eznik, that the purpose of the Stranger's activity as Jesus was to overthrow not only the Law but the entire created order of the cosmos. Such a view would presuppose that the whole nature and activity of the Creator are evil and deserving of destruction. We will address this issue in greater depth in chapter 4.

Supporting the probability that these arguments likely stood side by side, while Irenaeus was clearly aware of the issue of the just God, he inveighs as well against Marcionite arguments holding that the Creator is evil. This is addressed in another section of his text in which he addresses claims that the Scripture holds evidence of the Creator's orders toward brutality and greed. God's demand of the Hebrews to steal the valuables of Egypt during the Exodus seems to have been a particular favourite of the Marcionites, "who cavil and find fault because the people did, by God's command, upon the eve of their departure, take vessels of all kinds and

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<sup>64</sup> *AH*, 4.8.2.

<sup>65</sup> *DA*, 10.

raiment from the Egyptians, and so went away.”<sup>66</sup> Irenaeus addresses these concerns by suggesting that the Exodus from Egypt was an image for the eventual Exodus of the Church from among the Gentiles,<sup>67</sup> and that the spoils had been earned through the labour that the Hebrews had performed for the Egyptians,<sup>68</sup> thereby making the command a just one. The strangely contradictory arguments that are being made by the Marcionites can be seen in the fact that in the example above regarding healing on the Sabbath, Irenaeus discusses the mercy of Jesus as transforming, though not overthrowing, the just Law, while in this example, he relies on the justice of God to give context to an apparently unmerciful command. The Marcionite intent in raising these issues is quite obvious; the Creator appears to violate His own Law, even to encourage others to do so as well! Such an act is not the domain of any being Who can be considered ‘just’, as it is both duplicitous and corrupt for a God to demand ‘good’ behaviour from His followers at one time only to urge them to violate His Law later. This kind of petty reversal is typical of the Creator as defined by Irenaeus’ Marcionite representation. At another point, for instance, Irenaeus claims that the righteous in the Creator’s Hell refused to follow the Stranger to salvation, because they believed His appearance to be one of the Creator’s tricks, to which they had become all too accustomed.<sup>69</sup> Again, the suggestion here is that some Marcionites, far from holding God to be ‘too fair’, rather believed that He often lied, deceived, and manipulated His creatures. This is again not a representation of a ‘just’ God, but one much closer to being outright ‘evil.’

### 3.4: Tertullian and Free Will

Like Irenaeus, Tertullian seems also to discuss the Creator as alternately judgemental and evil.<sup>70</sup> Again, it is not unreasonable to assume that he does so because of a number of distinct Marcionite arguments for the imperfection of the Creator. However, while Irenaeus addresses Marcion himself as a historical figure and then directs the majority of his arguments explicitly against contemporary

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<sup>66</sup> *AH*, 4.30.1.

<sup>67</sup> *AH*, 4.30.4.

<sup>68</sup> *AH*, 4.30.2.

<sup>69</sup> *AH*, 1.27.3.

<sup>70</sup> John J. Gunther, “Syrian Christian Dualism,” *Vigiliae Christianae*, 25, 2 (1971): 84.

Marcionites, Tertullian frames the *Adversus Marcionem* as a treatise directed specifically against Marcion himself, often even addressing him in the second person, after the style of courtroom oration. However, if the treatise was to be useful as a tool against Marcionites, and not simply as an invective against a long-dead heretic whose theology had undergone further development in the intervening years, it would have to address the actual theological speculations of contemporary Marcionites. Irenaeus's account and the *Dialogue of Adamantius* both show that these speculations were quite varied as regards the interplay between goodness, evil, and justice. Tertullian is therefore in a strange position, in which his purpose requires him to address multiple divergent ideas, but his form constrains him to portray these ideas as unified and cohesive, as they would be if they were all held by a single "Marcion."

Like Irenaeus, Tertullian spends much more time on the apparent evil nature of the Creator as opposed to His justice. If Moll's argument is correct, i.e. that Marcionite theology originated with a claim that the Creator was evil, and only later acquired the argument that He is unduly harsh in His justice, this could be an indication that in Irenaeus's and Tertullian's time, the arguments from evil were still more prevalent in Marcionite circles. Both Irenaeus and Tertullian are closer to Marcion chronologically than the author of the *Dialogue of Adamantius* and other works which have an equal or greater focus on the justice of the Creator as opposed to His evil nature. This supports Moll's conclusion that the tradition tending toward portraying the Creator as just as opposed to evil becomes more prominent as the tradition develops.

Tertullian addresses the Creator's evil nature in the form of a relatively standard presentation of the basic problem of evil, which sees an irreconcilable problem in the presence of evil in the world given the assumptions that God is omnipotent, omniscient, and good.

So if, being good, He had wished a thing not to happen, and if, having foreknowledge, He had been aware that it would happen, and if He had power and strength to prevent it from happening, that thing never would have happened which under these three conditions of divine majesty it was impossible should happen. But, you conclude, as that did happen, the very

opposite is proved, that God must be assumed to be neither good nor prescient nor omniscient: because inasmuch as nothing of that sort could have happened if God had possessed these attributes of goodness and prescience and omnipotence, it follows that it did happen because God is devoid of these qualities.<sup>71</sup>

This is a common argument, and it can be resolved in a few different ways.

Tertullian however does not wish to simply prove that evil is not present in the world; he agrees with the Marcionites on this point, that the presence of evil in the world is obvious. He therefore wishes to find a different source for it, in order to absolve the Creator of guilt. This is accomplished primarily through a discussion of human culpability for sin. If humans are capable of free will, then this can be seen as a possible way for evil to enter the system without incurring guilt on the part of the Creator. The justice which the Marcionites oppose is a preventative and corrective for this evil, such that the entire scheme gradually tends toward self-perfection. This argument offers both a justification for the presence of evil in the world, which at the same time does not render the Creator guilty for it, and it also provides a rationale for the “just” nature of the Creator, which the Marcionites apparently also use to prove His imperfect nature.

Tertullian’s argument on this point comes out in a discussion of the reference of evil actions of mankind back to their Creator. As in the arguments related to the Creator being tarnished by His relationship with evil matter, which we will see below, Tertullian confronts a Marcionite position that the Creator, as the progenitor of man, is therefore shown to be evil simply as a result of the fact that humans can perform evil deeds. He writes,

In any event, you [Marcion] say, the very substance of the Creator is found to be capable of sin, because the breath of God, that is the soul (*anima*), sinned in man, and it is not possible for the corruption of the part to be not referred to the original whole (*nec potest non ad originalem summam referri corruption portionis.*)<sup>72</sup>

This appears to be the same argument, after the pattern of the bad tree which brings forth bad fruit, which the Marcionites also use to level guilt on the Creator as a result

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<sup>71</sup> *AM*, 2.5.1-2.

<sup>72</sup> *AM*, 2.9.1. My translation.

of the evil of the material world. The argument here is, then, not that the Creator is unduly harsh in His justice, but that He is Himself actually guilty of evil. Responding to this claim, Tertullian enforces a Scriptural distinction between “breath” (*afflatus*) and “spirit” (*spiritus*).<sup>73</sup> The two are not identical; the former is a kind of image of the latter,<sup>74</sup> and as a result it is necessarily both distinct from and lesser than the original. By virtue of this distinction, the guilt of the “breath” (that is, the souls of individual humans) does not impugn the spirit of the Creator.<sup>75</sup> Tertullian cements this point with a colourful analogy: “You yourself do not by blowing into a flute make the flute into a man, even though you blow something of your own soul, as God did of his spirit.”<sup>76</sup>

This argument does more, however, than absolve the Creator of the sins of humans; it simultaneously provides a rationale for the Creator’s apparently harsh justice. The soul is not simply a means of distancing human error from the Creator; “It admittedly possesses those lineaments of God, in that soul is immortal, is free, in control of its own choice.”<sup>77</sup> Thus, the justice of the Creator is not an inherent part of His being, but rather a reaction to what humans choose to do with their own free will: “God, Who until the man had sinned had from the beginning been solely good, from thenceforth became a judge, stern and, since the Marcionites will have it so, cruel.”<sup>78</sup> This justice can rightly be said to be ultimately caused by the errors of humanity, and it serves to guide them back to goodness, goodness as well being a choice that humans must make of their own volition.<sup>79</sup> It is therefore most absurd for Tertullian that the Marcionite argument appears to hold that the Creator’s justice is itself evil;<sup>80</sup> it is in fact a mercy in itself, in that it allows humans to advance toward perfection. Adam himself knew that God’s justice was provisional: “A very inexperienced heretic was he. He was disobedient: yet he did not blaspheme his

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<sup>73</sup> *AM*, 2.9.2.

<sup>74</sup> *AM*, 2.9.3.: “Imago ergo spiritus afflatus.”

<sup>75</sup> *AM*, 2.9.9.

<sup>76</sup> *AM*, 2.9.6.

<sup>77</sup> *AM*, 2.9.4.

<sup>78</sup> *AM*, 2.11.1.

<sup>79</sup> *AM*, 2.13.1.

<sup>80</sup> *AM*, 2.12.4.



Creator, nor accuse his Maker: for since his own first beginning he had found Him kind, and supremely good; and if He was a judge, it was Adam who made Him so.”<sup>81</sup>

Tertullian’s impressive argument here therefore counters both of the Marcionite claims for the imperfection of the Creator. He goes on in the remainder of this section to discuss Marcionite objections to the Law itself, as did Irenaeus, and he puts special focus on the question of retributive justice.<sup>82</sup> This is an issue that arises as well in the *Letter of Ptolemy to Flora*; Ptolemy resolves this issue by arguing that while some sections of the Law are divine, others are human, including retributive justice. Tertullian does not follow Irenaeus in this textual argument, rather employing his argument above, claiming that the Creator mandated retributive justice in order to provide a disincentive and keep humans from sinning.<sup>83</sup> It is clear that Tertullian finds his argument for the nature of the soul as both distinct from the Creator and also possessed of free will to be entirely effective at neutralizing Marcionite arguments both for the Creator’s evil nature as well as His harsh justice.<sup>84</sup>

### 3.5: Conclusion

We see then from the above arguments that Tertullian represents Marcionite arguments as alternately arguing that God is himself evil and that His justice is unnecessarily severe in the enforcing of a problematic Law. As Moll shows, and as we see in Irenaeus and in later documents such as the *Dialogue of Adamantius*, this is entirely probable as a representation of Marcionite thought as contemporaneous with Tertullian. The Marcionite tradition appears to have undergone something of a progression in its discussion of what exactly makes the Creator objectionable. The world of matter is definitely involved as a smirch on the Creator’s activities, as we will see in the next chapter. However, His nature is not excusable either, and this is as a result of the fact that the God is evil in Himself or else judges humans too harshly with a Law they cannot fulfill. Historically, the tendency seems to have begun with the former and then blended in the latter as the tradition developed.

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<sup>81</sup> *AM*, 2.2.7.

<sup>82</sup> *AM*, 2.18.1.

<sup>83</sup> *AM*, 2.18.2.

<sup>84</sup> *AM*, 2.12.3-4.

Tertullian, as well as Irenaeus, stand not at the very beginning of the Marcionite tradition, but neither is their position very far removed from the time of Marcion himself. Just as we would expect, their discussion of Marcionism focuses largely on the Creator as evil, while also incorporating what was probably for their time a minority view that He is also unduly just. The end result for Tertullian is a markedly accurate image of conceptions of the Creator's nature as presented by his own Marcionite contemporaries. However, as Moll has shown, Marcion's own conceptions probably did not include the element of 'harsh justice', and therefore Tertullian's framing his treatise as a criticism of Marcion *himself* is likely less than reliable. This error on Tertullian's part is something that we will see many times throughout this analysis of his representation of Marcionism. Given his attention to detail, it was almost certain that he himself was aware that he was addressing a synthesis of traditions and not the 'original' Marcionism without embellishment. Apparently choosing to sacrifice a degree of accuracy in order to maintain the form of his work, he was able to retain his fiery condemnation of Marcion as a single individual, thereby providing cohesiveness to his work and also imparting to Marcion the unorthodoxy displayed by his later followers.

## Chapter 4: The Creator, His Actions: Cosmology

### 4.1: Evil Matter

As Harnack rightly notes,<sup>85</sup> it is certain that Marcion's point of departure was an apparently irreconcilable discord between certain divine activities, leading to a bifurcation of the God of Judaism and early Christianity into opposing entities. It is clear that one of these entities is creative, the other redemptive. The stark division between these two has led Marcionism to be seen as a pure dualism, much like Zoroastrianism. However the truth is somewhat more murky; throughout the representations of Marcionism that we have, some have posited more than two divine principles. This third is often responsible for evil in some way, and used to assume the burden of guilt for the existence of evil in Marcionite traditions which aim to portray the Creator as primarily just as opposed to evil. In other traditions, this same theological 'niche' is filled by the presence of pre-existent evil matter. The sources taken together therefore present us with a somewhat confused series of cosmological traditions linked to Marcionism, many of which agree on the Creator's use of pre-existent matter. This *hyle* is co-eternal with the Creator, leading to its being discussed as a third 'god' by authors such as Ephrem and Eznik; 'god' here representing the idea of a pre-existent *arche*. Because this tradition appears to have been developed in different ways throughout the evolution of the Marcionite doctrine, it is necessary to appraise its likely presence in Marcionite thought during Tertullian's day.

While Harnack argues in support of the presence of 'evil matter' in Marcionism from the beginning,<sup>86</sup> the earliest sources on Marcionism do not overly concern themselves with the question of the actual components in the creation, but rather the simple fact that the Marcionites considered the world the creation of a

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<sup>85</sup> Harnack, *Marcion*, 22-23.

<sup>86</sup> Harnack, *Marcion*, 68.

lesser or evil God. Hence the testimony of Justin<sup>87</sup> and that of Irenaeus do not provide complete cosmologies.<sup>88</sup>

Harnack suggests that Marcion's own views on the nature of the world as a construct of evil matter are not fully developed into a coherent cosmology.<sup>89</sup> Rather, Harnack argues that Marcion's position on the subject was mandated by the necessity of a source of evil whereby the Creator's world could be condemned, as the Creator himself is not evil by nature.<sup>90</sup> Marcion's insistence on the validity of the Old Testament as a source of information regarding the Creator also necessitates that he hold the creation of the world to occur before the creation of any evil entities (devils), and thus evil cannot come originally from such principles. Harnack argues therefore that the inclusion of a principle of evil matter, while admittedly an "alien element" in Marcion's cosmology transmitted to him through the Syrian Gnostic Cerdo,<sup>91</sup> provides a relatively simple argument<sup>91</sup> for the existence of evil in the Creator's world from the beginning, with the devil as a later creation.

[S]ince in his view the Creator of the world is not "evil", Marcion required in any case an evil principle alongside this creator and *for his exoneration*. This was required at the very beginning of things, at which point the devil—according to biblical tradition himself a creature of God—could not yet appear. From this perspective, matter was essential to Marcion's view, though as soon as the devil is present in the picture he can leave matter out of consideration and, in fact, he now let it drop. The lack of clarity here (matter and devil) is typical of Marcion's "stopping in the middle of a thought," indeed, of his tendency to avoid philosophical thought.<sup>92</sup>

As we have seen above, Harnack's view on this matter has been challenged since the publication of his famous monograph on Marcion, particularly his insistence that Marcion *himself* considered the Creator to be characteristically just to the exclusion of all other qualities. We have seen above that it is certainly not out of the question

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<sup>87</sup> Justin Martyr, "Apologies," in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. I, ed. Phillip Schaff (Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885), 1.26.

<sup>88</sup> Andrew McGowan, "Marcion's Love of Creation," initially presented to *Patristica Bostoniensa* in 1999 and the NAPS Annual Meeting, 2000.

<sup>89</sup> Harnack, *Marcion*, 68.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.* That the Creator is not evil by nature is Harnack's assertion, which has been challenged in recent years; see Chapter 3.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>92</sup> Harnack, *Marcion*, 68-69.

to assume that Marcion's own conception of the Creator included an actual evil nature, which readily answers the question of where evil could have come from. Harnack's assertion that Marcion's idea of prime matter comes from Syrian Gnosticism is simply mentioned here, not supported, and it too has come under some scrutiny.<sup>93</sup> This passage in particular has not withstood the test of time, and in light of recent work seems a slightly desperate attempt to skirt the reality that original Marcionism dealt with the potential for an evil Creator. Nevertheless his analysis here shows at least that questions of cosmology are not given ready answers in early Marcionite thought, or more accurately, there were probably multiple Marcionite conceptions of the creation of the world, differing in their understanding of the extent to which evil was present in the world, its original source, and the role of prime matter. The multiple possibilities here are similar to those we discussed in the last chapter.

#### 4.2: "Marcionite" Cosmological Models

The most detailed cosmologies given for Marcionism come from later sources. Particularly detailed 'Marcionite' cosmologies are given by Ephrem the Syrian and Eznik of Kolb.<sup>94</sup> Both of these systems represent a systematized cosmology with an 'aeonizing' tendency similar to contemporary Gnostic thought, such as that of Valentinus.<sup>95</sup> Ephrem's *Prose Refutations* provide us with this cosmology, in which the world is seen as a tripartite structure with pre-existent *hyle* at the bottom, and above it the realm of the Creator followed by the realm of the Stranger. Ephrem goes into great detail regarding the interactions of these various levels and their principles; as an example:

But if that boundary [between the heaven of the Stranger and the heaven of the Creator] was capable of being crossed so that also the Stranger crossed it and came down to us, as they say, and the Souls also rent it asunder and ascended, as they falsely state, then (it follows that) a boundary which could be crossed would not be able to prevent the Maker from going up to the Domain of the

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<sup>93</sup> See John G. Gager, "Marcion and Philosophy," *Vigiliae Christianae* 26, 1 (1972).

<sup>94</sup> Ephrem Syrus, "*Hymni contra Haereses*", in *Hymns*, trans. Kathleen E. McVey (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1989), 48.

<sup>95</sup> The Gnostic Valentinus described a complicated hierarchical cosmological structure consisting of 'aeons,' spiritual beings who are emanations of the divine and also, in some sense, successive levels of divine reality (*AH* 1.1-3.)

Stranger. If, therefore, when He was able to go up He was unwilling to trample down the boundary of his Companion, He is a God who is worthy of praise, since even those things which he (i.e., Marcion) has invented, redound (lit., cry out) to his praise. But if He had the will to go up, and the Stranger above allowed Him, let them show us why... And if the Good (Being) was guarding himself, He was verily afraid lest He (i.e., the Maker) should injure Him. And how did He who was afraid in his own Domain, come to the Domain of the Maker to struggle with Him?<sup>96</sup>

Ephrem's mythologized version of this cosmological scheme is a rather sudden shift in reported views on the Marcionite tradition. While earlier heresiologists (including Tertullian) report on apparent logical errors or contradictions inherent in Marcionite dualism, stories of actual combat between the divinities or reports of the 'physical' problems regarding the positioning and status of their respective heavens appear in Ephrem as a startlingly mythological take on an otherwise rationally-oriented theological tradition. Why, then, do these sources give us this representation? The most apparent possibility is that they are simply a *reductio ad absurdum*; gathering what they understood of Marcionite principles of cosmology, the Syrian writers took them to what they understood to be their logical conclusion, demonstrating thereby that the Marcionite system proved unsatisfactory once analyzed in full. If we can be satisfied that this is the intent, we can write off these cosmologies simply as polemical exaggerations of some fundamental Marcionite cosmological traditions which are themselves not likely to be nearly so fantastical.

There are other possibilities, however, for the origin of these cosmologies. One possibility can be found by considering the time period in which these treatises were written. The relatively late dates of Ephrem (fourth century CE) and Eznik (fifth century CE) meant that writer opposed to heresy had more on his plate than just Marcion; to the contrary, at this time Marcionism was somewhat on its way out, and newer systems, such as Manichaeism, were gaining steam. As David Bundy writes, rather than an actual representation of Marcionite ideas on the subject, these later 'anti-Marcionite' polemics were probably meant principally to bolster

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<sup>96</sup> Ephrem Syrus, *Prose Refutations against Mani, Marcion, and Bardaisan*, trans. C.W. Mitchell (Williams and Northgate, 1912), ch. 3.

arguments against Manichaeism, a more serious threat to the orthodoxy of the time and a tradition which was likely repurposing the earlier Marcionite arguments in favour of dualism. As he writes,

Central to [Ephrem's] anger with Marcionism is his conviction, and it is probably correct, that Manichaeism drew modes of philosophical expression and adherents from the Marcionite tradition. Because of this observation there is preoccupation with the logical consequences of Marcionite thought for the wider scope of theology and cosmology.<sup>97</sup>

Ephrem even goes so far as to address his *Prose Refutations* to Mani, Marcion, and Bardaisan *together*, and to discuss their various beliefs almost interchangeably, as though they are all adherents of a single faulty tradition. It was indeed a very usual thing for orthodox writers to hold that all heresies share a single root and a single underlying belief system; Irenaeus, for instance, traced all heresy to Simon Magus,<sup>98</sup> while Tertullian saw heresies as largely engendered by philosophy.<sup>99</sup> We also should not discount the marked similarities between these cosmologies and Gnostic cosmological speculation, which was typified by *aeons*, multiplied strata of heavenly realms or emanations of the godhead, through which divine beings passed up and down in scenes remarkably similar to Ephrem's 'Marcionite' cosmology.<sup>100</sup>

We can reasonably assume the possibility therefore that these cosmologies preserved by these sources constitute a kind of logical expansion of Marcionite thought into complicated systems, in order to use the apparent incoherence of these systems as arguments against the far more cosmologically invested mythologies of Manichaeism and (particularly Valentinian) Gnosticism. As such they may not represent real Marcionite thought at all, and they certainly not Marcionite thought as contemporaneous with Tertullian. This type of logical expansion for polemical purposes is not unlike the complicated 'cosmology' given by Tertullian in his introduction to the *Adversus Marcionem*, as we will see below.

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<sup>97</sup> David Bundy, "Marcion and the Marcionites in Early Syriac Apologetics," *Museon* 101, 1 (1988): 29-30.

<sup>98</sup> *AH*, 1.23.2.

<sup>99</sup> *AM*, 5.19.7.

<sup>100</sup> For an example, see works like "Allogenes the Stranger" and the Apocryphon of John, from the Nag Hammadi Library (*The Nag Hammadi Scriptures*, ed Marvin Meyer (New York: HarperCollins, 2007.))

### 4.3: Matter and Philosophy

The tendency to exaggerate Marcionite cosmology as a polemic against other religions cannot, however, explain away elements which appear to have been present in Marcionism since the beginning, foremost among these being the presence of evil matter, as discussed above. These issues appear to derive ultimately from Marcionite sources or recollection, and so they are not likely to have been introduced for extraneous reasons. The use that these later writers make of this element of Marcionite cosmology does appear to give us some insight into the nature and origin of the Marcionite concept of evil matter, as explained by Drijvers in *Marcionism in Syria*.

Drijvers accounts for the presence of prime matter in Marcionite cosmology by suggesting the influence of Middle Platonism on early Marcionite writers.<sup>101</sup> This is contrary to the long-standing tradition established by Harnack that Marcion was not at all influenced by contemporary philosophy in the formation of his theology. The environment of Middle Platonism, drawing on a long Platonic history which generally includes a Demiurge and prime matter, finds expression in Marcionism, such that the soul's escape from the material world to the immaterial world constitutes an implicit rejection of the ruler of the world of matter.<sup>102</sup> In this view, matter itself serves as the antagonist from which souls must escape, with the Demiurge as an intrinsic part of the system. As Drijvers writes, "In all Platonic schools and systems the soul or its rational part finds its origins with the Highest God and salvation is, therefore, salvation from the Demiurge and a return to a purely noetic state."<sup>103</sup> It appears likely that Marcion mapped the Christian faith along the lines of this philosophy, arriving at a critical rejection of the world of matter (the Creator's cosmos) and the Demiurge (the Creator himself). Eternal prime matter

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<sup>101</sup> Han. J.W. Drijvers, "Marcionism in Syria: Principles, Problems, Polemics," *The Second Century* 6 (1988): p. 162.

<sup>102</sup> Drijvers, "Marcionism in Syria," 161-164.

<sup>103</sup> Drijvers, "Marcionism in Syria," 163. In most Marcionite systems the soul does not originate from the higher God, but Drijvers illustrates one somewhat later Marcionite tradition in which it does. This is the sect of Apelles, which we will mention in a later chapter. Gunther similarly suggests a trend in later Marcionism attributing creation of the soul to the higher God (Gunther, "Syrian Christian Dualism," 91).



appears to be present from this source as well; details of Marcionite cosmology are strikingly similar to cosmological material from the *Timaeus*, in which “the Deity, when engaged in the formation of the elements, had found ‘all that is visible’ already in existence as a chaotic mass moving without rule.”<sup>104</sup> The influence of this philosophical environment upon Marcionism is entirely likely; Marcion “Interpret[ed] the gospel within a Platonic philosophical framework which was common and ordinary philosophy for every well-educated man in the second century C.E.”<sup>105</sup>

Drijvers therefore argues convincingly here that Harnack’s account of the origin of prime matter as an element in Marcionite cosmology is likely mistaken. Harnack has often been criticized for an oversimplification which casts Marcion as ‘the first Protestant’; we have already seen how this causes him to identify the Creator as ‘just’ rather than outright ‘evil’, instituting a trend in scholarship which has only lately been challenged. It is Harnack’s hesitance to call the Creator ‘evil’ which leads him to his statement that prime matter is only evil in Marcionism because Marcion needed evil to be present in the world “for [the Creator’s] exoneration”<sup>106</sup> – it is likely that his analysis of the role of Satan in assuming responsibility for evil (thereby providing further ‘exoneration’ for the Creator) is likewise an assertion we must evaluate skeptically. If Marcion’s conceptions about the material world do indeed derive from Platonic philosophy, we certainly need look no further to find a reason for that world to be despised; for Platonic philosophy, the world of matter, along with its ruler, has always been something to be escaped. As Drijvers writes,

*Hyle* or evil matter is consequently not a *Fremdkörper* in Marcion’s system, as Harnack thought it was, ascribing it to Marcion’s supposed teacher, the Syrian Gnostic Cerdo, but a constituent part of it. And Marcion’s supposed “*Flucht vor dem philosophischen Denken*” is due to considering him exclusively a biblical theologian under Pauline influence who had not the faintest knowledge or idea

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<sup>104</sup> Edward Zeller, *Outlines of the History of Greek Philosophy*, trans. Sarah Francis Alleyne and Evelyn Abbot (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1886) 147. Zeller cites *Timaeus* 30A, 52Df., 69B.

<sup>105</sup> Drijvers, “Marcionism in Syria,” 167.

<sup>106</sup> Harnack, *Marcion*, 38.

of contemporary philosophy. Tertullian or Clement of Alexandria could have taught us better.<sup>107</sup>

Ephrem therefore did not so much misrepresent Marcionism as he did emphasize the philosophy that really was present in the tradition, creating in the process a ‘Marcionite cosmology’ which is really aimed at identifying the apparently absurd conclusions that can be drawn from a synthesis of Christianity and philosophy.<sup>108</sup> He is not the first to do so; Tertullian as well chides Marcion for the absurdity of combining Christianity with (Epicurean) philosophy,<sup>109</sup> arguing against Marcion that “We are taught about God by the prophets and by Christ, not by philosophers or Epicurus.”<sup>110</sup> Tertullian’s opposition to precisely this kind of ‘combination’ of Christianity and philosophy cause him to create a similar polemic argument, outlining a rather absurd ‘Marcionite cosmology’ based on what Tertullian imagines to be the logical consequences of Marcionite philosophical thinking.

So, while the belief in the pre-existence of matter and a negative view of it is well enough attested to have likely been a concept present in most Marcionite strains of thought, very detailed cosmological arguments were not characteristic at least of Marcionites contemporary with Tertullian and perhaps were lacking throughout the history of the tradition. The Syriac sources seem to have directly attacked the presence of pagan philosophical ideas in Marcionite arguments (as did Tertullian) in order to vastly expand the cosmological scheme,<sup>111</sup> both to illustrate the perceived absurdity of such a complicated and non-monotheistic system (as we will see Tertullian do as well) as well as to draw comparisons between Marcionism and the then-larger threats of Manichaeism and Gnosticism.<sup>112</sup> The important thing to note here is that the influences of philosophy appear to be really present in Marcion, and that they were simply exaggerated in order to make these points. In light of this, Harnack’s unsupported assertion that the idea must have come from

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<sup>107</sup> Drijvers, “Marcionism in Syria,” 169.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> *AM*, 5.19.7.

<sup>110</sup> *AM*, 2.16.2. My translation.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Drijvers, “Marcionism in Syria,” 158.

Syrian Gnosticism appears to highlight his own mistake in assuming that Marcion was purely a religious thinker who refused to countenance philosophical thought.

#### 4.4: Tertullian's Positive World

Tertullian addresses the Creator in the second book of the *Adversus Marcionem*. He attempts to reinforce the orthodox understanding of a single God Who is responsible for both the creation of the universe and the saving of men's souls. Thus, his second book is apologetic in nature, attempting to vindicate the Creator as *summum bonum* against the claims of the Marcionites. That is, he attempts to refute arguments that the Creator is less than the highest good and therefore commingled somehow with evil in His very essence, and also that the work of the Creator, tainted as it is with brute matter, evil, or both, is itself flawed—a creation unworthy of a perfect God, and therefore evidence of this God's imperfection.

Tertullian appears to have two main points to make regarding the creation. The first is that the creation is itself good, and that its goodness is evidence of God's goodness. Tertullian spends a good deal of time on this point, which is effectively a proof for the goodness of God by an analysis of His works. The Marcionites cannot deny that their Creator is the maker of the world, so Tertullian uses this point against them by attempting to show that the world is not the abhorrent prison that Marcionite thinking makes it out to be. The nature of his argument therefore shows that he was quite aware of the negative language which the Marcionites were fond of using to disparage the world and, by extension, its Creator. His second point is that the world was created *ex nihilo*; similarly, we find proof here that he correctly recognizes eternal prime matter in Marcionite cosmology, which, as we have seen above, is again likely to have been an actual detail of contemporary Marcionite cosmological speculation.

Tertullian relies largely on biblical exegesis of Genesis to confirm the goodness of the creation,<sup>113</sup> and he perhaps makes a reference to the Marcionite conception of evil as a constituent element in the creation when he claims against

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<sup>113</sup> *AM*, 2.4.2-4.

them that “the world consisted of none but good things.”<sup>114</sup> Citing John<sup>115</sup> regarding proofs drawn from works, Tertullian uses his exegeses for the goodness of the world to confirm the goodness of its Creator.<sup>116</sup> It is valuable to note here that Marcionites also appear to have appreciated and used the proof from works; however, for Marcionism, the undeniable deficiency of the material world is proof of the Creator’s lack of goodness and power. We will encounter these arguments in chapter 5, where we will briefly cover Marcionite asceticism as an expression of contempt for the material world, and therefore a celebration of the Stranger, Who is utterly removed from this imperfect creation. Marcionite arguments also condemn the Creator because He *can* be known, and known to be imperfect, from His imperfect works.<sup>117</sup> Tertullian therefore finds himself required to vindicate the inherent goodness of the created world in order to refute the Marcionite arguments for the deficiency of the Creator.

In his introduction to the *Adversus Marcionem*, Tertullian appears to imply that Marcion’s belief (that the Creator is guilty because of His creation of an inferior world) is a prior assumption on his part, one which Marcion simply fit to the Scriptures. Note that this cynical observation coincides closely with the possibility illustrated by Drijvers, above. Tertullian writes “[Marcion], finding the Creator proclaiming ‘It is I who create evils’<sup>118</sup> when he had already presumed [Him] the author of evil things, indeed from other arguments, which are persuasive to the perverse...”<sup>119</sup> These ‘other arguments’ (*aliis argumentis*) stand in opposition here to a statement from the book of Isaiah, possibly suggesting that they come from an extra-Scriptural source. Frustratingly, Tertullian does not specify exactly where these arguments come from, but it is not unreasonable to suggest that these ‘arguments’ are philosophical arguments of the kind suggested by Drijvers, especially given that the word chosen is *argumentis*, which is suggestive of philosophical speculation. We have also discussed above Tertullian’s general

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> John, 10:25,38.

<sup>116</sup> *AM*, 2.5.3 (p. 99).

<sup>117</sup> *AM*, 2.2 (p. 87).

<sup>118</sup> Isaiah 45:7. My translation.

<sup>119</sup> *AM*, 1.2.2 My translation.

understanding of heresy as a kind of mangled Christianity mixed with philosophy, which is ultimately at the root of every heresy.

Tertullian goes on to suggest that because Marcion assumed the guilt of the Creator as a result of His creation, “interpreting, regarding the Creator, the evil tree, bearer of evil fruit (that is, evils), he presumed that there ought to be, for its part, a good tree, [bearer of] good fruit.”<sup>120</sup> We will see in later chapters that the Marcionite exegesis of the parable of the good and bad trees is a very important theme for their theology. Tertullian then goes on to discuss the belief in the Stranger, the second part of the theology, which compliments and resolves the first. Then, he adds “He had also a certain Cerdo, this scandal’s shaper... (*Habuit et Cerdonem quendam, informatorem scandali huius...*)”<sup>121</sup>

This may have been the substance behind Harnack’s claim that Marcion’s idea of ‘evil matter’ came through Cerdo, but it seems more likely that Tertullian is claiming Cerdo’s influence only as regards the second part of the Marcionite claim, namely the existence of the Stranger. The discussion of the Creator being held guilty by the proof of His own works comes before a somewhat lengthier section regarding the Stranger, and it is only after *this* section that we see Cerdo’s name mentioned. Tense may also be significant here; Tertullian reports Marcion’s ‘presuming’ the inherent evil of the world from the ‘other arguments’ in the pluperfect (*praesumpserat*), perhaps indicating that it had come *before* his ‘presuming’ (here in the perfect, *praesumpsit*) the existence of the Stranger. Also discussed in the perfect is Marcion’s ‘having’ (*habuit*) Cerdo as the *informatorem* of the (singular!) *scandali*.

It seems then that Tertullian believed Marcion to have been aware of ‘arguments’ claiming that the world is inherently evil and that this fact is a blemish against the ruler of the world, and that he was aware of these arguments before he had actually encountered the Scriptures. Tertullian also seems to suggest that while these arguments may have anticipated Cerdo’s ‘shaping’ a resolution in the form of the idea of the Stranger, they nonetheless preceded Marcion’s acquaintance with

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid. My translation.

<sup>121</sup> *AM*, 1.2.3. My translation.

Cerdo, and therefore would appear (contrary to Harnack) to come not from Syrian Gnosticism, or at least, not from Cerdo.

Interestingly, Tertullian does seem also to be aware of a Marcionite understanding of evil as a product of the devil, suggesting that Marcionites still ultimately hold the Creator to be responsible by proxy. “But if you transfer the charge of wrongdoing from the man’s account to the devil’s, because it was He who incited the man to sin, and if you hope by this means to direct the blame against the Creator, as having created the devil...”<sup>122</sup> The context of this argument seems to suggest that the ultimate goal of Marcionite theodicy is to absolve humans of responsibility from evil and thereby to impart the evil present in the world to the Creator. This is of course the opposite of Tertullian’s own rationalization for the existence of evil, as we have seen in the previous chapter. Here and above, then, Tertullian presents what he sees as two different and contrasting Marcionite attempts to make this point, by arguing alternately that the world is itself evil by nature or that the evil in the world is caused by the action of the Creator’s servant, the devil. These contrasting arguments likely represent the actual ambiguity of Marcionite cosmology and theodicy in Tertullian’s time.

#### 4.5: Creation *Ex Nihilo*

Tertullian’s second point is that the creation was accomplished *ex nihilo*; he considers this to be further proof for the goodness of the creation and, by extension via the proof from works, another argument for the goodness of God.<sup>123</sup> The Creator is shown to be good both in that He created good things and that He created them from nothing; Tertullian makes a direct nod to Marcionite cosmology with the line “even if derived from some other material, as some people wish it, even so [the Creator’s works] would have been made out of nothing, because they were not what they are now.”<sup>124</sup> Tertullian is therefore aware of the Marcionite claims that the world was created from prime matter, arguing that even if this were true (which it is not), the Creator would still at the very least be responsible for the arrangement of

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<sup>122</sup> *AM*, 2.10.1.

<sup>123</sup> *AM*, 2.5.3.

<sup>124</sup> *AM*, 2.5.3-4.

this matter into a coherent physical order, which Tertullian appears to consider the same thing as creation *ex nihilo*. Tertullian's argument here is somewhat strange, though it is an effective argumentative tactic, attempting to show that the Marcionites are wrong even based on their own premises. In either case, we have evidence from this passage that he was aware of the Marcionite cosmology's appropriation of eternal prime matter.

He makes reference to this belief more explicitly in a lengthy *reductio ad absurdum* in his introductory book to the *Adversus Marcionem*: "And next, if [the Stranger] too has constructed his world of some subjacent material, unbegotten and uncreated, and co-temporal with the God—which is Marcion's view of the Creator..."<sup>125</sup> This direct statement seems to suggest a familiarity with a Marcionite cosmology of pre-existent matter of the type preserved by earlier sources, discussed above.

The context of this quotation is a cosmology and theology created by Tertullian from what he considers to be the logical end result of Marcion's teaching; the elaborate system of at least nine separate divinities is not a reflection of actual Marcionite doctrine, nor does Tertullian claim that it is. However, as Drijvers notes,<sup>126</sup> this type of mythologizing on Tertullian's part is not dissimilar to what Ephrem and Eznik would later do with the same intention, as we have seen above – that is, to draw out the philosophical influences upon Marcionism and to argue that right religion is incompatible with philosophy, which Tertullian at least saw as the great progenitor of all heresy.

#### 4.6: Conclusion

We can assume from the above however that Tertullian is not taking any great liberties in his candid discussion of Marcionite cosmology. His arguments against Marcionite conceptions of the process and the elements of the created world seem to run along fairly general lines. He responds to Marcionite claims that the world is somehow evil in its essence and/or corrupted by the activity of the devil; these two possibilities are discussed as if they are separate (if conflicting) arguments made by

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<sup>125</sup> *AM*, 1.16.4.

<sup>126</sup> Drijvers, "Marcionism in Syria," 169-170.

contemporary Marcionites, a supposition supported by the work of Harnack and Drijvers. Other than his remarks on this latent evil, among the only concrete assertions made by Tertullian regarding Marcionite cosmology is the presence in the system of pre-existent matter, which he opposes to the orthodox doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. This claim is likewise well-supported throughout the history of writings on Marcion and Marcionism. As Drijvers and Bundy show, the cosmological elements that arise in the later polemical tradition are probably late elaborations on the imagined logical consequences of Marcionite doctrine, and are probably ultimately concerned with an implicit critique of philosophy, Manichaeism, and potentially Gnosticism, rather than Marcionism. We should not be surprised to find them largely lacking in Tertullian. As a result, Tertullian's arguments regarding the Marcionite conception of cosmology give us a fairly accurate picture of this complicated system; indeed, for the purposes of this thesis, this may be the subject on which he is the most accurate, though the confused and contradictory traditions for Marcionism in the sources require that we not overstep the evidence in our reconstruction. It can be said with some safety, however, that Tertullian's representation of Marcionite cosmology, as influenced by philosophy and as aiding a theodicy which transfers the guilt of wrongdoing from humans to the Creator, is more than likely a reliable one.



## Chapter 5: The Stranger, His Nature: The Alien God

### 5.1: The Stranger's Creation

Marcionites referred to the higher God represented by Jesus as ἄγαθός and ξένος.<sup>127</sup> The characteristic goodness of the higher God is primarily represented through His salvific act, which will be analyzed in the succeeding chapter. Here we are concerned with His appellation ξένος: this issue of the higher God as 'Stranger' is undeniably one of the cornerstones of Marcionite theology, and one which requires careful attention.

The Marcionites apparently conceived of the higher God as ultimately alien to all things in or related to this world: this includes humans, both their bodies and their souls (an issue which will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter), but also the material world itself as well as the world's Creator. There is neither kinship nor equity between the higher and lower principles—indeed, there is barely even comparison.<sup>128</sup> The higher God is both greater than and wholly different from the Creator in every sense.<sup>129</sup> Harnack argues<sup>130</sup> that Marcion found the seed of this idea in Luke: "No one knows who is the Son except the Father, or knows who is the Father except the Son, and those to whom the Son wishes to reveal Him."<sup>131</sup> Therefore, the true Father, the Stranger, was wholly unknown before His appearance in the person of Jesus, and wholly beyond the affairs of the created world or its Creator.

The Marcionites emphasized this alien nature in many ways; the most important, which we will focus on for the purposes of this chapter, are as follows. (1) Because the Stranger is entirely different from the material world of created things, the question of whether or not He 'creates' anything Himself becomes somewhat

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<sup>127</sup> Robert P. Casey, "The Armenian Marcionites and the Diatessaron," *Journal of Biblical Literature* vol. 57, no. 2 (1938): 190. See also Harnack, *Marcion*, 80: "Through all the centuries of the existence of the Marcionite church and in all the languages that the Marcionites spoke, 'the Alien' or 'the good Alien' remained the proper name for their God. Conversely, from the standpoint of God men also were called 'the aliens.' That they nevertheless had come together and that the aliens had become the children of God was confessedly the great mystery of this religion."

<sup>128</sup> Cf. *DA*, 3, (Megethius: "There is nothing in common among them.").

<sup>129</sup> Harnack, *Marcion*, 80.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>131</sup> Luke 10:22. My translation.

complicated. If He created at all, He must have created only immaterial things; He certainly has no dealings with matter. As a result, (2) the person of Jesus did not have a physical body but rather appeared as a phantasm (that is, Marcionite Christology was docetic) and (3) the Stranger is eternal whereas the Creator is not.<sup>132</sup> Finally, (4) the new God, the saviour of a new community, is revealed in what is functionally a new gospel (though Marcion himself saw it as restoration),<sup>133</sup> and while the Scriptures of the Jews are not *false* (in that they do provide true information about the Creator<sup>134</sup>) they do not apply to the Stranger, and are superseded by the Stranger's message. Since Jesus is simply a phantom or apparition of the Stranger in the world of matter, neither do the Scriptures apply to Jesus himself. That is, Jesus, Who is the Stranger, is *not* the messiah.<sup>135</sup>

We have seen above that the Creator is understood in Marcionite theology to have assembled the material elements into the world; He is also responsible for the creation of human souls, which are therefore originally His possessions, as we will see below. Indeed it seems likely that, for those who maintained a theology closest to that of Marcion, one of the primary distinctions used to qualify the higher God as 'Stranger' is the issue of creation; it is the unique activity of the Creator, and the Stranger therefore must have created nothing. Thus, the pseudepigraphic III Corinthians, which Martin Rist argues convincingly is at least in part a refutation of Marcionism,<sup>136</sup> describes a heretical sect in 'Corinth' which teaches "concerning the world, that God did not create it, and that God knoweth not the world"<sup>137</sup> and also counsels believers against anyone claiming "that the creation of man is not God's work."<sup>138</sup> It is likely that these are references to Marcionites discussing the Stranger. Likewise, Hippolytus claims straightforwardly that while Marcionites differ on

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<sup>132</sup> Harnack, *Marcion*, 81.

<sup>133</sup> Michele Murray, *Playing a Jewish Game: Gentile Christian Judaizing in the First and Second Centuries CE* (Waterloo: Wilfried Laurier University Press, 2004) 103-4.

<sup>134</sup> Harnack, *Marcion*, 73-4.

<sup>135</sup> Harnack, *Marcion*, 79.

<sup>136</sup> Martin Rist, "Pseudepigraphic Refutations of Marcionism," *The Journal of Religion* vol. 22, no. 1 (1942): 46-50.

<sup>137</sup> "III Corinthians," trans. M.R. James, in *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), 1.7.

<sup>138</sup> *III Corinthians*, 1.13.

various points, “they all affirm that the good (Being) has made nothing at all... And they allege that (the just Being) made all things out of subjacent matter.”<sup>139</sup> Ephiphanius, as well, describes the Stranger in such terms: “One [God] is the unnameable, invisible One on high Which he likes to call a ‘good God,’ but Which has made none of the things in this world.”<sup>140</sup>

Later Marcionites, however, began to consider the possibility that the Stranger had indeed created.<sup>141</sup> Such creations included the Stranger’s ‘heaven’ and potentially human souls, and are typified by a distinction between visible things (made by the Creator) and invisible things (made by the Stranger). We have seen above, in Ephrem and Eznik, the complicated hierarchical structures which indicate that the Stranger has His own ‘realm’ or ‘heaven’ above the Creator; as we have shown, such intricate cosmologies (much like Tertullian’s own) are probably best explained as a sort of *reductio ad absurdum*, but it is not unreasonable to assume an implicit criticism here of views that the Stranger is also, in part, a creator. Another suggestion is found in Irenaeus, who writes:

The Bythus, therefore, whom they conceive of with his Pleroma,<sup>142</sup> and the God of Marcion, are inconsistent. If indeed, as they affirm, He has something subjacent and beyond himself, which they style vacuity and shadow, this vacuum is then proved to be greater than their Pleroma. But it is inconsistent even to make this statement, that while He contains all things within Himself, the creation was formed by some other.<sup>143</sup>

It is possible that here we see evidence of a Marcionite tradition in which the Stranger is seen as a kind of ‘higher Father’ above and beyond the material universe and ultimately *productive of it Himself* (“He contains all things within Himself”). However, the crucial juxtaposition in Marcionism is between the Creator and the Stranger; to make the Stranger ultimately productive of all things is to espouse a

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<sup>139</sup> Hippolytus, “*Refutation of All Heresies*,” trans. J.H. MacMahon, in *Anti-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 5, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Cox (Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1886) 10.15. Referred to henceforth as *RH*.

<sup>140</sup> *Pan.*, 3.1.

<sup>141</sup> John G. Gunther, “Syrian Christian Dualism,” 85. See also Andrew McGowan, “Marcion’s Love of Creation.”

<sup>142</sup> These are references to Valentinians. The *bythus*, God in Himself, emanates in the “aeons,” spiritual beings who also constitute levels of divine reality. The arrangement and fullness of the aeons is the *pleroma* (*AH*, 1.1-3.)

<sup>143</sup> *AH*, 2.3.1. The comment is mine.

theology much more reminiscent of Gnosticism. Indeed, Irenaeus' sketch here is primarily, perhaps even completely, concerned with Valentinian Gnosticism as opposed to Marcionism. If that is the case, why does Irenaeus allude to Marcion even briefly in this section?

We are sure of one strand of Marcionite thought which came to a Gnostic-type conclusion on this issue: the sect of Apelles. We will see in the next chapter that the question of what the Stranger needs to do in order to secure human souls and take them away from the Creator becomes somewhat complicated. Apelles offered an alternative, ultimately probably derived from Gnosticism, though Gunther suggests<sup>144</sup> that local Syrian dualisms (such as that of Saturninus of Antioch) were at least similar to divergent Marcionisms like Apelles' as regards the Stranger's 'creation'. For Apelles, the Stranger is ultimately productive of the human soul;<sup>145</sup> the act of salvation then is reminiscent of contemporary Gnostic and later Manichaean soteriologies of the type which aim to 'reclaim the divine sparks' from the lower world. As we will see, this will become an interesting point as regards Tertullian's representation of Marcionism on this issue. For the moment it is sufficient to mention Apelles briefly here, and also to indicate that here we have an issue which blurs the line somewhat between religious traditions. The orthodox heresiologists generally, including Tertullian, treat the Apelles sect as a separate tradition from Marcionism, though they acknowledge that he was originally Marcion's disciple. Modern scholars, including Harnack, have followed suit; Harnack devotes an entire section to Apelles in his monograph on Marcion<sup>146</sup> but rarely mentions him outside of it. The tradition at large, then, seems to see this issue as divisive between 'pure' or 'original' Marcionism on the one hand and 'Gnostic' Marcionism on the other, a division which is serious enough to distinguish between religious traditions (the 'Marcionites' vs. the 'Apelles sect' and so forth). Thus, for the orthodox, true 'Marcionism' was distinguished by utter separation between the Creator and the Stranger, to such an extent that to suggest that the Stranger has any

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<sup>144</sup> Gunther, "Syrian Christian Dualism," 85-87.

<sup>145</sup> Harnack, *Marcion*, 119.

<sup>146</sup> Harnack, *Marcion*, 113-121.

kind of affinity or relationship to the world before His sudden appearance, is to no longer hold a 'Marcionite' theology.<sup>147</sup>

## 5.2: Docetism

Despite these variations in the answer to the question of whether or not the Stranger created anything, there was general consensus<sup>148</sup> among the Marcionites that He did not involve matter in His actions at all. The Marcionites reviled the physical world as a work of the Creator, a miserable prison from which the Stranger offers release. Harnack writes, "For Marcion, this stupid and wretched world, teeming with vermin, this miserable hole, was only an object of contempt."<sup>149</sup> The alien nature of the Stranger is here very pronounced: His salvation (immaterial, eternal) is the polar opposite and negation of the Creator's terrible production (material, mortal). As an expression of their contempt for matter, the Marcionites themselves were ascetics, adhering to a vegetarian diet<sup>150</sup> and forgoing marriage "to refuse assent to the works of the Demiurge."<sup>151</sup> They did use 'the Creator's matter' in their religious ceremonies; Andrew McGowan argues that this was made permissible through a claim that the Stranger 'redeems' the matter from the world and sanctifies it through His own holiness, in a kind of microcosm or exemplar of the process of redemption for human souls.<sup>152</sup>

The anti-material nature of Marcionite theology is seen most strongly in their docetic Christology, which holds that the body of Christ was not physical but only 'seemed' to be (cf. *δοκέω*). This can be understood to follow naturally from the presupposition that matter is the realm of the Creator; whatever means the Stranger used to reveal Himself therefore cannot have been material. Every heresiologist who deals with Marcion mentions this fact: for example, Irenaeus reports the Marcionite

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<sup>147</sup> Harnack, *Marcion*, 80.

<sup>148</sup> Interestingly, Apelles is again the exception here. He held that Jesus did have a material body, but not a natural birth; in His descent from the Stranger's heaven, Jesus assumed a body which He constructed *Himself* from the world's elements. This body was dropped and the material allowed to return to the cosmos at the moment of the ascension.

<sup>149</sup> Harnack, *Marcion*, 71.

<sup>150</sup> *AM*, 1.14.

<sup>151</sup> *Pan.*, 42.1.5.

<sup>152</sup> Cf. McGowan, "Marcion's Love of Creation."

position that Jesus was not born, but “manifested in the form of a man”<sup>153</sup> and that in his version of Luke Marcion “remov[ed] all that is written concerning the generation of the Lord”<sup>154</sup> presumably referring to the birth narrative, which would have indicated that Jesus had a fleshly body.<sup>155</sup> In his introductory statements on Marcion, Epiphanius does not mention docetism, but he rejects the docetic position at many points in his analysis of Marcion’s ‘tampering’ with the Scripture.<sup>156</sup> Rather than indicating that this point is not important to Marcion, this rather suggests that Marcion’s docetism was a well-known reality for the audience to whom Epiphanius is writing, an issue to combat through specific exegesis (indeed it was not an idea specific to Marcionism, but one which resurfaced again and again in the varied heretical traditions in Epiphanius’ *Panarion*.) Hippolytus reports that “Marcion... rejected altogether the generation of our Saviour. [His doctrine,] was that independent of birth, [the Logos] Himself descended from above in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar.”<sup>157</sup>

Harnack cautions his readers against the assumption that the lack of material flesh meant for the Marcionites that Jesus had not been capable of suffering. Probably the most widely-accepted Marcionite soteriology involved a transaction between the Creator and the Stranger, whereby the Stranger paid the price of His own suffering and death for the enslaved souls which He liberated. Denying that suffering and death would therefore introduce a problem in the Marcionite conception of the mechanics of salvation.<sup>158</sup> Harnack writes,

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. Thus it is utterly incorrect to think that according to Marcion Christ only apparently suffered, only apparently died, and so forth. This was the judgement of his

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<sup>153</sup> *AH*, 1.27.2.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>155</sup> Epiphanius also indicates that Marcion omitted the genealogy and birth narrative from Luke (*Pan.*, 42.11.4).

<sup>156</sup> Cf. Epiphanius’ exegetical commentary at the end of *Pan.*, ¶ 42 (Scholia 49, 66, 71, 74, 75 etc.)

<sup>157</sup> *RH*, 19.

<sup>158</sup> See the next chapter for a closer analysis of this ‘purchase’.

opponents, but he himself connected the illusion only to the substance of the flesh.<sup>159</sup>

Darrel D. Hannah agrees with Harnack, writing as follows: “Marcion... while denying Christ’s birth, and apparently restricting his resurrection to Christ’s soul, highly valued the reality of the passion.”<sup>160</sup> This is another point at which Marcionism appears to have differed from contemporaneous Gnostic traditions. Many Gnostic docetists held that it was unnecessary and problematic for the Christ to experience suffering; for Gnostics generally, Christ came simply to impart the salvific *gnosis*, so the ‘transactional’ element of Marcionite Christology is absent in their theology. As a result, Gnostic writings often include a scene in which the Christ reveals that the crucifixion was entirely deceptive, or that there was some sort of substitution for His body, or that the Christ left His material body before the crucifixion such that He did not in fact suffer and die. This last position, for example, is held by the author of the *Revelation of Peter*:

I saw Him apparently being arrested by them. I said, “What do I see, Lord? Is it really You they are seizing, and are You holding on to me? And Who is the one smiling and laughing above the cross? Is it someone else whose feet and hands they are hammering?” The Savior said to me, “The One you see smiling and laughing above the cross is the living Jesus. The one into whose hands and feet they are driving nails is His fleshly part, the substitution for Him. They are putting to shame the one who came into being in the likeness of the living Jesus.”<sup>161</sup>

This illustrates how the docetic position was used to different ends by Marcionites and Gnostics. For the Marcionites, and for Gnostics generally, the material world was to be abhorred, and therefore it was problematic to assume a natural birth or a real material body. The Gnostics could extend this docetism to include the passion as well, because generally speaking the passion is extraneous to the Gnostic means of

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<sup>159</sup> Harnack, *Marcion*, p. 83.

<sup>160</sup> Darrell D. Hannah, “The Ascension of Isaiah and Docetic Christology,” *Vigiliae Christianae*, 53, 2 (1999): 168.

<sup>161</sup> “*Revelation of Peter*,” trans. Marvin Meyer, in *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures*, Ed. Marvin Meyer (New York: HarperCollins, 2007) 81.3-82.3.

salvation. Marcionites, however, needed to retain the passion as an intrinsic element to their 'transactional' soteriology.<sup>162</sup>

### 5.3: Eternity

Though the "body" of Jesus is capable of suffering and death, the Stranger is of course eternal, whereas it appears that the Creator is not. Because the Creator is ultimately tied intrinsically to the transient world of matter, He is destroyed along with it when material things come to an end. Harnack<sup>163</sup> here points to the evidence of Eznik, who writes:

"Moreover, [the Marcionites] undermine the other saying of the apostle, which is truly spoken: 'When He has destroyed all principalities and powers, He must reign, until He has put all His enemies under His feet' [1 Cor. 15:24ff.]. And the Marcionites say that the Lord of the world will destroy Himself and His world forever."<sup>164</sup>

In a note,<sup>165</sup> Harnack argues that in His destruction of the cosmos and of Himself, the Creator acts as somewhat of an agent of the Stranger. Because the Stranger is ultimately opposed to the entire scheme of matter, He aims for its complete destruction and its replacement with a world of the Stranger's nature, immaterial and eternal (Harnack refers to this as a transition from the Creator's *saeculum* to that of the Stranger). In destroying His material world, the Creator therefore performs the will of the Stranger. Harnack sees as evidence for this the statement of Hippolytus that even for the Marcionites, "everything goes back to one" and "one is responsible for all things."<sup>166</sup> This idea may also be intended by Epiphanius, who, reporting Marcionite doctrine, writes of the world "that it will come to an end eventually, and that it is possible for it to come to a complete end through the attentions of the good God."<sup>167</sup> The unequal natures of the two 'gods' are therefore brought to the fore here. As the polar opposite of the Stranger, Who is powerful, good, and eternal, the Creator here is seen to be weak, the maker of an unsatisfactory world doomed to destruction, Himself the agent of another, and even

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<sup>162</sup> Harnack, *Marcion*, 87-88.

<sup>163</sup> Harnack, *Marcion*, 91.

<sup>164</sup> Cited in Harnack, *Marcion*, 91.

<sup>165</sup> Harnack, *Marcion*, 162 (note 85).

<sup>166</sup> Hippolytus, *Noet.* II (cited in the above note).

<sup>167</sup> *Pan.*, 42.7.10.



subject to mortality. Harnack rightly notes<sup>168</sup> that this being is less a ‘god’ than a ‘world spirit’, not even worthy of comparison to the Stranger.

#### 5.4: New Message, New Savior, New God

Finally, the Stranger is wholly unanticipated, unknown by nature,<sup>169</sup> and as a result the Old Testament provides no prophecy of Him. The prophecies referring to the Christ refer therefore to a separate individual, someone who will appear in the world as a servant of the Creator, sometime in the future (that is, between the death of Jesus and the end of the Creator’s *saeculum*). Irenaeus devotes a large section<sup>170</sup> to combatting this position, largely through exegetical means. He writes, “Such are the arguments [to be used] in opposition to those who maintain that the prophets [were inspired] by a different God, and that our Lord [came] from another Father.”<sup>171</sup> Likewise, Epiphanius announces that he can prove against the Marcionites “that Christ is not foreign to the Old Testament.”<sup>172</sup> Indeed, for the Marcionites, the antithetical nature of the Stranger and the Creator mandates that Jesus is not the son of the Creator, as we have in the *Dialogue of Adamantius*:

*Megethius*: “The God of the Jews is one [God], but the Other is not His son.”

*Adamantius*: “How has it been proven that Christ is not the Son of the Creator?”

*Megethius*: “That the Christ destroyed the Law of the Creator, and showed that [it was destroyed.]”<sup>173</sup>

At the same time, however, as mentioned above, Marcionites did not hold that the Old Testament was a fabrication. The prophecies therein were true, but they relate only to the Creator; so the Christ is an altogether separate individual from Jesus, the ‘Son’ of the Stranger. This is probably the background to one of the few material artifacts remaining from the Marcionite tradition, a Marcionite church in the town of Lebaba (modern-day Deir Ali, Syria). The church bears an inscription which refers to Jesus as *χρηστὸς*, ‘The good [one]’.<sup>174</sup> The point is clearly made by the refusal to use

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<sup>168</sup> Harnack, *Marcion*, 162 (note 85).

<sup>169</sup> As Tertullian writes at 5.16.

<sup>170</sup> *AH*, 4.34.

<sup>171</sup> *AH*, 4.34.5.

<sup>172</sup> *Pan.*, 42.9.6.

<sup>173</sup> *DA*, 10.

<sup>174</sup> Philippe Le Bas and William Henry Waddington, *Inscriptions grecques et latines recueillies en Grèce et en Asie Mineure*, vol. III (1870), reprint, Hildesheim: G. Olms, (1972), inscription 2558. The actual

the common formulation χριστὸς, 'Christ': the Marcionites did not worship Christ, but rather the emissary of the good God. There is also a relationship between Jesus, representative of the 'new' God, and the true Gospel (reconstructed by Marcion from Luke) as a *new* book unrelated to the Old Testament. This is seized upon by Harnack as a touchstone of this new faith, crystalized in these arguments about the two messiahs. He writes,

Just as the World-Creator has a Son whom He will soon send to the earth, so also the good God has a Son Who has come ahead of that other Son; but there is a difference between the two. The former is called "Son" only figuratively, for he will be a man from the tribe of David who will be anointed with the spirit of His God. The latter also is called 'Son' only figuratively, but He is distinguished from His Father only by name, for "in Christ, God was revealed by Himself." The Father and the Son form an equation, just as do the Son and the Gospel.<sup>175</sup>

The alien nature of the Stranger therefore determines that His Scripture is alien in relation to the Creator, and that likewise, the 'Stranger's Christ' is distinct from the Christ promised by the Old Testament.

To conclude our reconstruction of the Marcionite understanding of what it meant for the higher God to be a "Stranger", we have found the following: (1) Because He is distinct from the Creator and, by extension, the Creator's world of matter, the Stranger has no creation, or at the least is creative only of immaterial things. This latter distinction seems to have been a matter of some contention, which is evidenced by the sect of Apelles being generally considered distinct from Marcionism proper. Expressing this hatred of matter, Marcionites themselves assumed the ascetic renunciation of meat and marriage. (2) Marcionite Christology was very generally docetic, as a result of the demand that the Stranger not be found to have any dealings in matter. Marcionite Scripture omitted birth narratives and references to the physical body of Jesus. (3) The Stranger is distinct from the Creator in His eternity; the Creator, unlike the Stranger, is apparently doomed to die in the dissolution of His material world at the end of His *saeculum*. By contrast, the

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form of the word is genitive, "ΙΗΧΡΗΣΤΟΥ" (likely Ἰη[σοῦ] χρηστοῦ). See also M.J. Edwards, "Χρηστὸς in a Magical Papyrus," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, Bd. 85 (1991): 232-236. The inscription refers to the church itself as a 'synagogue', reflecting the shared use of the word by both Jews and Christians at the time.

<sup>175</sup> Harnack, *Marcion*, 82.

Stranger and His immaterial domain will endure forever. Finally, (4) the alien nature of the Stranger demands a new gospel, necessitating in turn that Jesus was *not* the messiah promised in the Old Testament, but a wholly new and unforeseen figure.

#### 5.6: Tertullian's *Summum Bonum*

Tertullian's basic strategy in responding to claims about the Stranger is to compare these claims to what he considers to be a common-sense understanding of divinity. He calls this "a definition which the consciences of everyone will recognize (*definitio quod et omnium conscientia agnoscet*)"<sup>176</sup> and indicates that it includes the following qualifications: "*Deum summum esse magnum, in aeternitate constitutum, innatum, infectum, sine initio, sine fine.* (God is the supremely great, firmly established in eternity, unbegotten, uncreated, without beginning and without end)."<sup>177</sup> This definition itself is somewhat problematic; as we have seen, most of the above qualifications do *not* apply to the Marcionite understanding of the Creator. As a result, Tertullian is not being altogether accurate in his representations of Marcionite thought when he expounds at some length the problems involved in positing two divine principles which *both* meet these criteria. Tertullian is arguing a moot point when he inveighs against the Marcionite Gods as "two entities supremely great"<sup>178</sup>; the Marcionites would object that the Stranger is of course the only *summum magnum* and that it is the Creator Who is ultimately undeserving of this definition.<sup>179</sup> It is perhaps for this reason that Tertullian qualifies these arguments, half-heartedly conceding later that Marcion's Gods are not equal.<sup>180</sup> However, he attempts to excuse himself with a somewhat unsatisfying semantic proof, that if the Creator is truly God then the Stranger cannot be, because divinity implies unity, and the two would be identical. If the Creator is less than the Stranger, then He is not a God at all, and the Marcionites are wrong again.<sup>181</sup> As we have seen, this latter option is closer to the truth for Marcionites; the Creator is a Demiurge, certainly not 'God' in the same sense that the Stranger is God. Tertullian nonetheless celebrates

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<sup>176</sup> *AM*, I.3.2. My translation.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>178</sup> *AM*, I.4.1.

<sup>179</sup> Harnack, *Marcion*, 80-81.

<sup>180</sup> *AM*, 1.6.

<sup>181</sup> *AM*, 1.7.

this argument as a victory, employing some dry humour as he claims “You are stuck, Marcion, in the midst of the swell of your own Pontus: the floods of the truth keep you in on one side and the other. You can establish neither equal Gods nor unequal: for two there are not.”<sup>182</sup>

This argument from comparison to a ‘common sense’ definition of deity is reapplied throughout Tertullian’s arguments regarding the nature of the Stranger. He argues that this definition is intrinsically present in all people and that it refers specifically to the God of the Old Testament. As he writes, “The knowledge inherent in the soul since the beginning is God’s endowment, the same and no other whether in Egyptians or Syrians or men of Pontus. It is the God of the Jews whom men’s souls call God.”<sup>183</sup> Importantly, this viewpoint enables Tertullian to judge the Stranger *against the Creator*; he argues that because the concept of ‘God’ refers directly to the Creator, any point at which the Stranger differs from the Creator is therefore essentially proof that the Stranger is not God. This is a somewhat troubling argument, as it presupposes equity between the two divinities, but it is effective: if everyone agrees that the Creator is a God, then why should we not apply the same criteria to the Stranger, Who is unknown but reputed to be a God? This allows Tertullian to make some fairly straightforward and effective arguments, as when he writes “Concerning the known [God], there is no dispute: it is obvious that He exists, since He could not be known unless He did exist. Concerning the unknown, there is a pressing question: for it is possible that He does not even exist, seeing that if He had existed He would have been known.”<sup>184</sup> It is difficult to refute such a straightforward point; the Marcionites however would of course argue that the Stranger is precisely that which brooks absolutely no comparison.<sup>185</sup>

Whatever the reliability of this argument, Tertullian’s criticism deals heavily with the Marcionite position that the Stranger has no creations of His own, as he considers it a defining characteristic of divinity that the divinity create, and be

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<sup>182</sup> *AM*, 1.7.7.

<sup>183</sup> *AM*, 1.10.3.

<sup>184</sup> *AM*, 1.9.6.

<sup>185</sup> Harnack, *Marcion*, 80.

known through His creations.<sup>186</sup> “For just as the Creator is God, and God beyond all doubt, for the reason that all things are His and that nothing is alien to Him, so also any other is not a God, precisely because all things are not His, and therefore are alien to Him.”<sup>187</sup> Here we see a complementary argument to one we have already seen Tertullian use in defense of the Creator; just as the Creator is seen to be true divinity by the testimony of His creation, the Stranger is proven to be lesser than the Creator in that He has not created, and has therefore not fulfilled the role of ‘God’, as Tertullian sees it.

### 5.7: Tertullian on the Stranger’s “Creation”

Interestingly, Tertullian does make reference to the idea that the Stranger did in fact make something. He claims that “You have said that your own God no less has His own creation, His own world and His own heaven.”<sup>188</sup> He follows this up with his cosmological *reductio ad absurdum*, probably not a reflection of true Marcionite cosmology, as we have seen above. Later, he writes “their next procedure is to share out two species of objects, things visible and things invisible, between two Gods as authors, and then claim the invisible things for their God.”<sup>189</sup> This is reminiscent of the ‘Gnostic-type’ Marcionite cosmology we have discussed above. It is difficult to say precisely where Tertullian gets this information. He does not name Apelles in reference to this, though he was aware of Apelles at the time of the writing of *Adversus Marcionem*. He refers to Apelles in the text twice: once in book 3 when discussing Apelles’ divergence from Marcion on the matter of docetism,<sup>190</sup> and once in book 4, chiding him for thinking that he is greater than Marcion.<sup>191</sup> Tertullian also mentions Apelles in another work, *De Anima*, writing explicitly that “Apelles tells us that our souls were enticed by earthly baits down from their super-celestial abodes by a fiery angel, Israel’s God and ours, Who then enclosed them firmly within our

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<sup>186</sup> *AM*, I.9.

<sup>187</sup> *AM*, I.1.2.

<sup>188</sup> *AM*, I.15.1.

<sup>189</sup> *AM*, I.16.1.

<sup>190</sup> *AM*, 3.11.2.

<sup>191</sup> *AM*, 4.17.11.

sinful flesh.”<sup>192</sup> It is difficult to determine why Tertullian fails to mention Apelles by name at this point in the *Adversus Marcionem*. *De Anima* appears to have been written after *Adversus Marcionem* (cf. *De Anima* 21.6, which refers back to the work on Marcion) but there was not likely to be more than a handful of years between the two.<sup>193</sup> We can speculate that either Tertullian had not yet learned of Apelles’ specific doctrine at the time of the writing of the *Adversus Marcionem*, or, possibly, that he was attempting a synthesis in order to name Marcion personally as the culprit for both variations of this theological detail. It is interesting to note that Tertullian does not dwell very long on this point, and he does not draw attention to the contradiction between two differing opinions, despite his general tendency to do so. This may be a clue that he was aware that this was not Marcion’s original doctrine. In any case, Tertullian shows a clear familiarity both with Marcionite arguments that the Stranger created nothing and other arguments that He created invisible things only.

Tertullian also discusses Marcionite asceticism,<sup>194</sup> arguing that the Marcionites for all their presumption are perhaps more lustful toward the Creator’s matter than they let on: “I am disposed to inquire whether you are perhaps sincere in this [asceticism], or if you do not yourself hanker after the things you reject... you despise the earth, from which was born that flesh of yours which you hate: yet you forcibly extract all its richness for you to feed on.”<sup>195</sup> In any case, Tertullian argues, no amount of asceticism can change the fact that Marcionites live in the material world and are forced to interact with it: “[T]he Marcionite still gets malaria... he is exposed not only to the Creator’s lightnings, with His wars and pestilences and other chastisements, but even to His scorpions. In what respect do you suppose yourself free from His kingdom, when His flies still tread upon you?”<sup>196</sup> and again, “Hypocrite:

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<sup>192</sup> Tertullian, “*A Treatise on the Soul*,” trans. Peter Holmes, D.D., in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. III (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, originally published 1885), 23.36.

<sup>193</sup> This chronology was retrieved from [www.tertullian.org/chronology.htm](http://www.tertullian.org/chronology.htm). The source is CCL II, pp. 1627-8, which derives from Harnack, *Die Chronologie der Altchristlichen Litteratur*, II, Leipzig, 1904, 256-296.

<sup>194</sup> *AM*, 1.14.

<sup>195</sup> *AM*, 1.14.4.

<sup>196</sup> *AM*, I.25.7.

even though by starving yourself to death you should approve yourself a Marcionite, which means, a repudiator of the Creator... into whatever material you are to be dissolved, you will be making use of the Creator's possessions."<sup>197</sup> Tertullian is also aware of the Marcionite use of the Creator's elements in religious services (water, oil, milk, and honey),<sup>198</sup> which he considers the height of hypocrisy: "Even in His own rites and ceremonies he cannot do without things begged and borrowed from the Creator."<sup>199</sup> Finally, the close of his book concerning the Creator deals at length with the Marcionite prohibition of marriage,<sup>200</sup> claiming that "among that god's adherents no flesh is baptized except it be virgin or widowed or unmarried, or has purchased baptism by divorce."<sup>201</sup> Tertullian, however, identifies as the cause of this particular type of asceticism the Marcionite understanding that marriage is "a traffic in unchastity."<sup>202</sup> It is far more likely that Marcionite renunciation of marriage was meant as a repudiation of matter and a means of halting the abhorred order of the Creator, as we have from other ancient sources, as seen above. Tertullian does admit that a strict vow of virginity would have one practical use: "You would have pleased us better, heretical god, if you really had acted counter to that Creator's ordinance by which He joined together male and female: for in fact even your Marcion was born of marital intercourse."<sup>203</sup>

#### 5.8: Tertullian on Docetism and the Creator's Death

Tertullian is pointedly aware of Marcionite docetism<sup>204</sup> and spends much of his third book arguing against it. His argumentation is largely aimed at questions related to the reality of Jesus' suffering during His passion. Tertullian argues that a phantom body cannot possibly experience real suffering; as a result, the entirety of the 'transactional' soteriology derived by the Marcionites falls flat. He writes,

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<sup>197</sup> *AM*, I.14.5.

<sup>198</sup> *AM*, I.14.3.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>200</sup> *AM*, 1.29.

<sup>201</sup> *AM*, 1.29.1.

<sup>202</sup> *AM*, 1.29.6.

<sup>203</sup> *AM*, 1.29.9. The 'heretical God' is the Stranger, who is addressed by the impossible vocative *Dee*; Ernest Evans suggests that this is to emphasize the perceived unreality of the God (*Ibid.*)

<sup>204</sup> *AM*, 3.8., "The heretic claims that Christ was a phantasm" (*Haereticus ...[est] phantasma vindicans Christum.*)

The sufferings of Marcion's Christ will fail to find credence: one Who has not truly suffered, has not suffered at all, and a phantasm cannot have truly suffered. Consequently, God's whole operation is overthrown. There is a denial of Christ's death, the whole weight and value of the Christian name, that death which the apostle so firmly insists on, because it is true, declaring it the chief foundation of the gospel, of our salvation, and of his own preaching.<sup>205</sup>

This indicates that Tertullian was aware not only of Marcionite docetism, but also that he recognized the necessity of the passion as something he could use against these docetic ideas. Here there is no elaborate argumentation, simply a firm denial that a phantasmal Christ could have really suffered and died; as we have seen above, this is a crucial point for the Marcionites. Tertullian is therefore attempting to drive a wedge between two fundamental Marcionite Christological beliefs.

Tertullian also remarks on the related issue of Jesus' nativity, which the Marcionites deny: "All this jugglery of a putative corporeity in Christ has been taken up by Marcion with this in mind, that evidence of human substance might not serve for proof of His nativity as well: for in that case our claim would be justified that Christ belongs to the Creator..."<sup>206</sup> Here an interesting point is raised, that a human birth would force the Marcionites to accept not only the physical body of Jesus but also the genealogies indicating that Jesus fits the prophecies for the Creator's messiah, which, as discussed above, Marcion apparently excised from his redacted version of Luke.<sup>207</sup> Other arguments against the docetic position include the charge that only 'seeming' to have a body makes Jesus a liar<sup>208</sup> and that to take on the appearance of something so reviled is inconsistent ("If He held flesh in contempt, as being earthly and, as you people keep on saying, packed with dung, why did He not for the same reason despise even the similitude of it?")<sup>209</sup> Tertullian also devotes some portions of his later exegetical books to the issue of docetism, writing with his characteristic biting humour that "*Plane facilius invenias hominem natum cor non habere vel cerebrum, sicut ipsum Marcionem, quam corpus, ut Christum Marcionis.*

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<sup>205</sup> AM, 3.8.5.

<sup>206</sup> AM, 3.11.1.

<sup>207</sup> Per Irenaeus (see above) and also Epiphanius (see his detailed information on Marcionite editions of the gospel, appended to his *Pan.*, ¶ 42.)

<sup>208</sup> AM, 3.8.3.

<sup>209</sup> AM, 3.10.1.



(Clearly you could more easily find a man born without a heart or a brain, like Marcion himself, than [without] a body, like Marcion's Christ.)"<sup>210</sup>

Tertullian does not directly address the issue of the 'death' of the Creator. We can find some hint of this idea in his more detailed expression of Marcionite understandings of the afterlife in book 3, where he writes:

'Yes,' you [Marcion] object, 'but I do hope for something from Him [i.e. the Stranger]—and this itself amounts to a proof that there are two different Christs—I hope for the kingdom of God, with an eternal heavenly inheritance (*aeternae et caelestis possessionis*): whereas your Christ promises the Jews their former estate, after the restitution of their country, and, when life has run its course, refreshment with those beneath the earth in Abraham's bosom (*post decursum vitae apud inferos in sinu Abrahae refrigerium*.)"<sup>211</sup>

While nothing is said explicitly about the term of the afterlife for those who do not accept the Stranger's salvation, the juxtaposition here between the Stranger's heaven as *aeterna possessio* and the Creator's afterlife, which is given no such quality, may be significant. The words used to describe the Creator's afterlife are negative ones, particularly *inferi* and *refrigerium*. The use of the word *inferi* implies that the Creator's afterlife will be a kind of Hell regardless of the merits of those sent there; Tertullian says this explicitly in book 1: "And what will be the end of him [who does not accept the Stranger's salvation] when cast out? He will be overtaken, they answer, by the Creator's fire (*ab igne creatoris*)."<sup>212</sup> The word *refrigerium* indicates "rest" or "relief" (the translator has rendered it "refreshment") but for Tertullian's context (North Africa in the second century CE) it was also used to refer to a type of funeral feast.<sup>213</sup> Thus, in contrast to the eternal afterlife promised by the Stranger, the Creator's Hell is characterized by suffering and death. It is perhaps not too much of a stretch to consider that this is a veiled reference to the Marcionite position holding that all of the Creator's works will come to an end, in contrast to the Stranger's domain, which remains eternal. We have also mentioned above Tertullian's claim that the word 'God' inspires an inborn understanding of a being

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<sup>210</sup> *AM*, 4.10.16.

<sup>211</sup> *AM*, 3.24.1.

<sup>212</sup> *AM*, 1.28.

<sup>213</sup> Johannes Quasten, "*Vetus Superstitio et Nova Religio*": the Problem of *Refrigerium* in the Ancient Church of North Africa," *The Harvard Theological Review* 33, 4 (1940): 253-266.

Who is *summum bonum* and, explicitly, eternal (indeed three of his five qualifications for what a 'God' is pertain directly to eternity). He has developed a good deal of polemical argumentation around these lines, and we can speculate that by acknowledging that the Marcionites very openly do *not* consider the two Gods to be equal in this regard, Tertullian is concerned that he will lose some of his argumentative foundation. Unfortunately, in such cases, it is always tenuous to consider why something is *not* included in the text.

#### 5.9: Tertullian on the New Savior

Tertullian is however quite aware of the Marcionite position that Jesus was utterly unexpected<sup>214</sup> and therefore was not the messiah, and that the Creator's messiah will appear during the His *saeculum* ("A Christ is still to come, as it is written that He will."<sup>215</sup>) Jesus is the son of the Stranger<sup>216</sup> whereas the messiah is the 'son, spirit, and substance' of the Creator.<sup>217</sup> Tertullian claims at several points that Marcion inherited the idea that the Creator's messiah has not yet come from the Jews.<sup>218</sup> This is of course very unlikely; rather, as we have seen Harnack suggest above, the idea that Jesus was not the figure prophesied by the Old Testament follows very naturally from the division between the two Gods and their Scriptures, which eliminates any equation between the two deities and mandates division in every other aspect. Tertullian recognizes this point as well: "The separation of Law and Gospel is the primary and principal exploit of Marcion... so that from the diversity of principles between those two documents they may argue further for a diversity of Gods."<sup>219</sup> Tertullian mainly refutes the Marcionite position on this issue with exegesis, which is the focus of much of his book on the Christ. He also mentions that it is not right or proper for a Christ to come without prophecy ("He had no right to come so unexpectedly"<sup>220</sup>) though, as Harnack writes, "If this gospel is completely

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<sup>214</sup> *AM*, 3.2.

<sup>215</sup> *AM*, 3.5.4.

<sup>216</sup> *AM*, 3.3.1.

<sup>217</sup> *AM*, 3.6.8.

<sup>218</sup> Cf. *AM*, 3.6.2-3, 3.7ff etc.

<sup>219</sup> *AM*, 1.19.4.

<sup>220</sup> *AM*, 3.2.1.

new in its message and in its effects, then its originator must also be a God who is hitherto unknown.”<sup>221</sup>

#### 5.10: Conclusion

To conclude our analysis of Tertullian’s representation of the strangeness of the Stranger, then, we can draw some general conclusions. Throughout these sections Tertullian proves more or less accurate, as he has been throughout. He does, however, have a few oversights. In his general criticism of the alien nature of the Stranger, Tertullian employs a comparison between the two Gods which amounts to an illustration of the absurdity of positing two separate and opposed *summa bona*. As Harnack has shown, the Marcionites would not have conceived of the Creator in the terms that Tertullian supplies for a *summum bonum*—a fact which Tertullian even acknowledges—and this causes his argument here to somewhat miss the mark. As a result, his more specific arguments on the various details which derive from this general critique import the same argumentative error.

Tertullian preserves the foremost Marcionite position on the ‘Stranger’s creation’, which is that the Stranger created nothing at all. Most of his argumentation which deals with this issue reflects this position. He does however also mention, in separate passages, that Marcion believes the Stranger has His own heaven, and later that the Stranger is productive of ‘invisible things’. As we have seen, such points are reminiscent of Apelles, though Tertullian does not mention Apelles here by name. It is possible then that Tertullian confutes these two traditions (which the orthodoxy in general tended to separate) in order to show Marcion as the common root of both. As we have seen in previous chapters, Tertullian does have a tendency to synthesize what are apparently multiple Marcionite traditions so that he can address the work as a whole to Marcion as an individual. His argument that the Stranger falls short of being a ‘God’ because He has not created represents the comparative error mentioned above. Tertullian mentions Marcionite asceticism, both their vegetarianism and their avoidance of marriage, though he connects the latter to concerns about chastity rather than the repudiation of matter. He also knows of the

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<sup>221</sup> Harnack, *Marcion*, 79.

Marcionite use of matter in religious rites, claiming even to know the specific materials used.

Tertullian is also aware of Marcionite docetism, with most of his criticism on this point relating to what he sees as a weak point in the doctrine: it demands that Jesus be a phantasm (so as not to be involved in matter) and also that the passion be real (so that it can function as the 'price' paid for souls to the Creator). This carefully-structured critique shows a marked familiarity with Marcionite doctrine. It is interesting to note here that Tertullian uses a criticism which would not be effective against the generally-docetic Gnostics, showing that these arguments are derived not from a criticism of docetism generally but rather Marcionite docetism in particular. He also criticises the Marcionite excision of the genealogies and birth narratives in Luke, which he sees as a dishonest tampering with the text in order to promote the false notions that Jesus had no body and that He was not the Creator's messiah. In general Tertullian's picture of Marcionite docetism is probably his most accurate representation of the Stranger's alien nature.

Tertullian did not address the issue of the ultimate impermanence of the Creator's domain, which includes His own life. This may have been impossible for him to consider given his argumentative strategy which assumes that the Marcionites think of both Gods as *summa bona* (a strategy he maintains even after reluctantly admitting that this is not how the Marcionites actually conceived of the Creator).

Finally, Tertullian reports accurately that the Marcionites held that Jesus was not the messiah. He criticizes them for the fact that there was no prophecy of Jesus if the Old Testament is considered to refer to another; we can perhaps consider this another error in assuming that the Creator and the Stranger had to be comparable, when in fact the very heart of Marcionism held that they were alien to each other in every way. Tertullian's repeated insistence that Marcion received this doctrine from the Jews is also highly questionable; as Harnack has shown, it is far more readily understood as a natural and necessary theological position, given that Marcionites considered the Old Testament to be the truth of a God not their own.

In general, then, Tertullian presents these issues more or less accurately, with only a few deviations, and includes some surprisingly detailed and correct information on relatively obscure Marcionite practices and beliefs, such as the Apelles-type 'creative Stranger' argument and the use of matter in the Marcionite religious rites. Where he omits issues or misrepresents them, we generally find evidence of his faulty argument that the two Gods need to be comparable, which is precisely missing the point. Otherwise, his assessment is quite fair, even if his tone is somewhat belligerent, as we have seen.

## Chapter 6: The Stranger, His Actions: Salvation

### 6.1: Freeing Strangers

Turning now to the question of the actions of the Stranger, we find that the most appropriate, and ultimately the *only* subject involved is that of the salvation of souls. While the Creator is responsible for the creation of the world and the Law, as well as, in most Marcionite systems, the action of condemning the unworthy according to a harsh retributive justice, the Stranger's salvation is His only activity. Apparently quoting a Marcionite position verbatim, Tertullian writes "[The Marcionites] ... say, 'For our God one work suffices, that by means of His great and unique goodness He has set men free, and [this goodness is] more valuable than all [the Creator's] locusts.'"<sup>222</sup>

By its nature, a discussion of Marcionite conceptions of salvation necessitates an examination of the work of Jesus, Who is in the last analysis the Stranger Himself,<sup>223</sup> appearing among men in order to confront the Creator in some manner and to open the way for humans to escape the Creator's vindictiveness. As we will see, the Marcionite conceptions of what was actually done to effect this salvation are fairly uniform, though complicated and at times paradoxical. It is necessary therefore to look closely at the evidence available for Marcionite conceptions of salvation and then to judge Tertullian's representation of them.

One issue that is consistent among nearly all Marcionite understandings of salvation is that the Stranger has absolutely no inherent responsibility or necessity to provide salvation. The totality of the human, body and soul, are creations of the lesser Creator God and therefore, by right, belong to Him. The higher God is therefore Stranger not only to the Creator and His material world but to humans as

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<sup>222</sup> *AM.* 1.16. My translation. We see in the reference to the Creator's 'locusts' a representation of the Marcionite conception of the Creator's world as corrosive, vile, and prone to destruction.

<sup>223</sup> Harnack, *Marcion*, 82. Harnack considers Marcion to be a modalist, that is, to believe that the distinction between Father and Son is in name alone; Harnack mentions that the orthodox classified the Marcionites as Modalists in order to discredit Modalistic Monarchianism in the fourth century, demonstrating that there are ideas in Marcion which would later come to be known as Modalism (Ibid.)

well, even to their souls.<sup>224</sup> Marcionism's focus on a Demiurge (characterized by evil, or at least ignorance and weakness) contrasted with a higher, salvific deity, has often led him to be compared to contemporary Gnostic groups, or to be seen as a precursor to Manichaeism;<sup>225</sup> however on this point we find a key difference. Manichaeism and many Gnostic groups acknowledged a pre-salvific state in which the Demiurge or evil *archon* had somehow seized or inherited a portion of the higher divine substance. In Manichaeism the portions of the 'good' are the spoils of a kind of divine warfare between eternally opposed good and evil principles,<sup>226</sup> whereas for many Gnostic groups<sup>227</sup> the higher, 'good' or 'spiritual' principle is trapped in a lower material world by the nature of the Demiurge itself, Who is in the last analysis a 'descendant' of the divine world. This descent is typically somehow degenerate, such as in the *Apocryphon of John*, in which the Demiurge is born through an abhorrent production by a higher principle without a divine 'consort.' In any case, the generation of the Demiurge causes fragmented and weak portions or 'sparks' of the higher spiritual principle to be embedded, through Him, into the abominable material world which He creates. The work of salvation, then, becomes the reclamation of these divine 'sparks' and the reconstitution of them in the higher, spiritual world. A similar theology is criticised in the Pseudo-Clementine material, where it is attributed to Simon Magus.<sup>228</sup> To the ancient heresiologists generally, Simon Magus was the root of all heresy;<sup>229</sup> to attribute a teaching to him was to call attention to a facet of belief which was understood to be generally present among all heretics. This further illustrates the pervasiveness, in the Christian context, of the concept of the imprisoned soul deriving ultimately from the higher, 'good' God.

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<sup>224</sup> As discussed in a previous chapter, Francois de Blois argues that this aspect of Marcionism makes it unlikely that Marcion was influenced by Iranian dualism, in which the gods are opposed cosmic forces within the same world. See his "Dualism in Iranian and Christian Traditions."

<sup>225</sup> De Blois, "Dualism in Iranian and Christian Traditions," 7, 11.

<sup>226</sup> De Blois, "Dualism in Iranian and Christian Traditions," 11.

<sup>227</sup> Typical of this type of mythology is the *Apocryphon of John*, though there are many examples.

<sup>228</sup> Gunther, "Syrian Christian Dualism," p. 92.

<sup>229</sup> See the *Didascalia Apostolorum*, trans. R. Hugh. Connolly (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929) 23.6.7.

This is decidedly not the case for most forms of Marcionism.<sup>230</sup> Rather, the Stranger is ultimately alien to *everything* in the created world, including human souls; He has no inherent relation to them at all. Thus, in ridiculing the conception of the Stranger, Epiphanius writes,

[H]e sent His Only-begotten into the world to take things from someone else's world, which He neither begot nor made—it will be found, either that He is invading someone else's domain or that, being poor and having nothing of His own, He is advancing against another person's territory to procure things which He does not already have.<sup>231</sup>

Epiphanius here illustrates a problematic which is seized on by nearly every prominent heresiologist who debates Marcionism: the Stranger's removal of souls from their rightful owner demands an explanation compatible with His entirely good nature. In short, He must be shown not to be a thief. Otherwise, as Epiphanius writes, "the God on high will turn out to be the more tyrannical, certainly not 'good,' since He sent His own Son, or Christ, to take what belonged to someone else."<sup>232</sup>

The salvific act of Jesus must function, then, to effect a legitimate transition of ownership; human souls, bound for damnation under the will of their owner and Creator, must somehow become the property of the Stranger such that He can take them to Himself. As Harnack writes, "It is His intention to redeem unto eternal life that which, by its origin and development, is rightly subject to death because it has nothing in it worthy of life."<sup>233</sup> The primary, and related, questions, then, are as follows: (1) how can humans, who are by nature dissimilar and alien to the Stranger (as He is to them), inherit a share in His eternal life? Is it necessary to do anything in particular in order to receive this salvation? (2) How is this transition of ownership effected, such that humans are freed from the control of the Creator and brought into the ownership of the Stranger in order to receive this life?

## 6.2: Freedom from Body and Law

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<sup>230</sup> A notable exception is the second-century figure Apelles, who apparently instituted a form of 'monotheistic Marcionism' which held that the Creator himself (and by extension all of His creations) were ultimately the production of the good principle, who can in this case no longer be referred to as 'Stranger'. See Drijvers, "Marcionism in Syria," 165. See also Gunther, "Syrian Christian Dualism," 85.

<sup>231</sup> *Pan.*, 1.42.6:2.

<sup>232</sup> *Pan.*, 1.42.7:5.

<sup>233</sup> Harnack, *Marcion*, 84.



As we have seen above, one of the primary distinctions between the Creator and the Stranger has to do with matter. While I have shown that the Creator is in most cases not thought to have created matter but rather to have ‘used’ it as a substrate co-eternal with Himself in the creation of the world, there can be no doubt that the Creator is still by His nature involved with matter whereas the Stranger is wholly spiritual. Therefore there can be no possibility of resurrection, in the orthodox sense, of both flesh and spirit: the flesh, bound up in and fashioned from evil matter, has no hope of salvation by the Stranger. While neither the body nor the soul ultimately come from or originally belong to the Stranger, the immaterial soul was conceived of as the only portion of the human composite worthy of salvation; the body – affected by, even an extension of, the evil inherent in its fundamental substance – is merely itself an occasion for further evil and utterly unworthy of any sort of redemption. As Harnack writes,

According to what Marcion taught about matter and the flesh, the decision could not be in doubt for him: only the soul is saved, for the flesh, which indeed is not even a product of the world’s Creator but belongs to matter, contains nothing that is essentially human but is only a loathsome mixture.<sup>234</sup>

We have evidence of the Marcionite belief in the resurrection of the soul alone (without the body) from Irenaeus, who writes: “Salvation will be the attainment only of those souls which had learned [Marcion’s] doctrine; while the body, as having been taken from the earth, is incapable of sharing in salvation.”<sup>235</sup> Epiphanius, similarly, reports: “Marcion says resurrection is not of bodies but of souls, and he assigns salvation to these and not to bodies.”<sup>236</sup> The heresiologists as a whole generally argue in response that this salvation of the soul alone (without the body) indicates an imperfection in the salvific action, in that man is not completely redeemed.<sup>237</sup>

Just as the question of *what* is resurrected is reevaluated by the Marcionites in order to exclude that portion of the human composite which pertains most closely

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<sup>234</sup> Harnack, *Marcion*, 89.

<sup>235</sup> *AH*, 1.27.3.

<sup>236</sup> *Pan.*, 1.42.4:6.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*

to the Creator (i.e. the body), the question of how, and indeed, whether, this resurrection is *earned* must also be given an answer which will distance this process from the Creator's mode of justification. Thus the justice of the Creator must be done away with by the loving compassion of the Stranger, Who, rather than assigning new terms and conditions for salvation, simply does not judge at all.<sup>238</sup> As the Marcionite Megethius is reported to have said in the *Dialogues of Adamantius*, "Neither to good, nor to evil does [the Stranger] purpose, but only by reason of compassion was He moved."<sup>239</sup> The Creator's Law, indeed the necessity of any Law in the attainment of salvation, had been dissolved – "the Christ destroyed the Law of the Creator."<sup>240</sup> Christians therefore had no use for the Torah and no compulsion to avoid violating the Law: the Syrian *Didascalia Apostolorum*, while it does not refer to the Marcionites specifically, discusses a general characteristic of heretics "that they should not employ the Torah or the prophets, and that they should blaspheme God Almighty."<sup>241</sup> While we cannot be sure that Marcionites are specified or included in this group, the lines immediately following also mention vegetarianism and abstaining from marriage as further signs of heresy, and both of these were apparently included in Marcionite practice.<sup>242</sup> In any case, it is clear that the Marcionites raised the ire of their orthodox contemporaries by claiming that the Creator's great enemies (Egyptians, Sodomites, pagans, etc.) would be justified by the Stranger. In this way they illustrated a God Whose goodness is truly infinite and therefore gives itself in full measure to all who accept it.

The Marcionites therefore stated it boldly: all manner of humans who reject the Creator's Law will be redeemed by the Stranger. The two Gods have radically opposed salvific operations: while the Creator offers His imperfect 'redemption' only to those who fulfill the requirements of the Law, the Stranger's redemption is

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<sup>238</sup> Harnack, *Marcion*, 81.

<sup>239</sup> *DA*, 3.

<sup>240</sup> *DA*, 10. See also *AH*, 1.27.2.

<sup>241</sup> *Didascalia*, 23.6.8.

<sup>242</sup> Martin Rist, "Pseudepigraphic Refutations," 41. See also David Bundy, "Marcion and Marcionites in Early Syriac Apologetics," 24-25. Bundy argues that these references are allusions to Marcionites, though he admits that later sections of the *Didascalia* promoting certain Jewish observances among Christians may indicate a redaction history, leading to a document which confutes two different and opposed anti-orthodox traditions. See also Rist, "Pseudepigraphic Refutations," 44.

available to all who accept it. Thus “The Lord has gone down even to Hades to save Cain, Korah, Dathan, Abiram, and all the gentiles who had not known the God of the Jews.”<sup>243</sup> Harnack found this to be the crux of Marcionite morality, rapturously describing the new freedom offered through the Stranger’s salvation:

[T]he gross transgressors who for punishment were tortured by the World-Creator, and the godless heathen as well, all of whom indeed had already received double and triple retribution for their sins according to the punitive code of the righteous God, yearningly hastened to welcome the new redeemer God. His compassionate love called them all, and they all came, and He saved them all; they trustingly leaped into His arms, and He led them all out of the place of torment into His kingdom of the blessed.<sup>244</sup>

Irenaeus reports on this as well, though unlike Harnack with a degree of disgust: “Cain, and those like him, and the Sodomites, and the Egyptians, and others like them, and, *in fine*, all the nations who walked in all sorts of abomination, were saved by the Lord, on His descending into Hades.”<sup>245</sup> The treatment of the souls already in hell apparently provided a kind of example of the terms of the choice that all men would be allowed to make: those still alive and those yet to be born will face the same choice, in order that the Stranger’s salvation should be fully available to all people. The requirement that all humans ever born have a chance to freely accept salvation was simply a matter of course for Christians generally, represented in both the Marcionite and the orthodox traditions.<sup>246</sup>

As for the ‘righteous’ in the Creator’s eyes, they gain no special favour with the Stranger by following the Creator’s Law. Marcionites apparently held that their way to salvation would be even more difficult than that of the gentile or the sinner. The reason for this was not jealousy or anger on the Stranger’s part, but rather unwillingness and suspiciousness on the part of the Creator’s righteous ones toward the Stranger. Epiphanius claims that the most righteous of the Creator’s chosen would refuse salvation due to a stubborn loyalty to the Creator:

[The Stranger] has left Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, [etc.] there [ie. in Hades] because, as [Marcion] says, they recognized the God of the Jews, the maker and

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<sup>243</sup> *Pan.*, I.42.4:2.

<sup>244</sup> Harnack, *Marcion*, 86.

<sup>245</sup> *AH*, I.27.3.

<sup>246</sup> Harnack, *Marcion*, p. 86.

Creator, and have done what is congenial to Him, and did not devote themselves to the invisible God.<sup>247</sup>

Irenaeus provides another reason for the unwillingness of the patriarchs and righteous ones to accept the salvation of the Stranger: accustomed to being tempted away from the proper observance of the Creator's demands, they see the appearance of the Stranger in the underworld as another trick, one which, if they should fall for it, would bring about further damnation:

[T]he serpent which was in Marcion declared that Abel, and Enoch, and Noah, and those other righteous men who sprang from the patriarch Abraham, with all the prophets, and those who were pleasing to God, did not partake in salvation. For since these men, he says, knew that their God was constantly tempting them, so now they suspected that He was tempting them, and did not run to Jesus, or believe His announcement: and for this reason He declared that their souls remained in Hades.<sup>248</sup>

Thus, the situation of those who receive salvation from the Stranger is clear: a salvation is offered which can fully remove them from the abominable situation in which they were created, both in their composition (in freeing them from matter) and in their responsibilities (in freeing them from the Creator's harsh Law). Those who are willing to accept this salvation will receive it, and in doing so they are brought into the Stranger's eternal life. Those who refuse the salvation, either out of stubbornness or suspicion, are left by their own choice to languish in the Creator's realm. Even the Creator's righteous ones attain an afterlife which is ultimately only a lesser form of damnation,<sup>249</sup> and one that is in the end (apparently) not even eternal.<sup>250</sup>

### 6.3: Jesus the Warrior

It remains now to be examined how this salvation is actually accomplished, and how this can be accorded to the Stranger's good nature such that He is not seen to be guilty of theft. The Marcionites apparently used two distinct arguments to justify this, likening the Stranger to a warrior on the one hand and a merchant on the

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<sup>247</sup> *Pan.*, I.42.4:4.

<sup>248</sup> *AH*, I.27.3.

<sup>249</sup> Harnack, *Marcion*, 91. See also De Blois, "Dualism in Iranian and Christian Traditions," 9.

<sup>250</sup> See chapter 5, above.

other. While these may seem like contradictory arguments, they are both well-supported in the sources. H.J.W. Drijvers, in his article, "Christ as Warrior and Merchant,"<sup>251</sup> presents Ephrem the Syrian's analysis of both these arguments, suggesting that despite his polemical stance against Marcion, the criticisms raised by Ephrem are meant to address these two Marcionite arguments for the means by which salvation is accomplished.

Drijvers indicates that Ephrem uses a discussion of the Transfiguration for his criticism of these arguments; this is apparently due to the fact that Ephrem had encountered Marcionite arguments defining the Transfiguration as the moment when this transition of ownership over human souls occurred.<sup>252</sup> According to Marcionite sources, Ephrem writes, the Transfiguration scene was not the harmonious point of agreement between old and new covenants, as the orthodox interpretation held,<sup>253</sup> but rather a scene of contention, one in which the Creator and Jesus somehow reckoned with one another in order to effect the transition of ownership of human souls from the one to the other.

Marcionite 'warrior-exegesis' of the Transfiguration apparently cast Moses and Elijah as guardians on the mountain, attempting somehow to thwart the plans of the Stranger and to defend the order of the Creator. Ephrem cites this argument directly, writing

But concerning Moses and Elijah who were found on the mountain in company with [Jesus], what do the Marcionites say that they were doing in His presence? But they say that they were guardians there.<sup>254</sup>

In this view, Jesus, as the representative of the Stranger, confronts Moses and Elijah, the representatives of the Creator. Jesus then takes ownership of human souls by force, and, as Drijvers summarizes from Ephrem's *Commentary on the Diatessaron*, the Transfiguration pericope closes as a declaration of triumph from the mouth of the Stranger:

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<sup>251</sup> HJW Drivers, "Jesus as Warrior and Merchant," *Studia Patristica* 21, (1989): 73-85.

<sup>252</sup> Drijvers, "Warrior and Merchant," 76.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid.

<sup>254</sup> Ephrem, *Prose Refutations*, 2.39, 87,16:31 (Cited in Drijvers, "Warrior and Merchant," 77).

Marcion apparently interpreted the Transfiguration as a defeat of the Creator, who is said to have been robbed. On this view, the Creator was silent, when the voice from heaven proclaimed: “This is my beloved Son, hear Him” ... this silence is seen by Marcion as a sign of weakness and anxiety.<sup>255</sup>

Drijvers also calls attention to other interactions between the Stranger and the Creator; one of these has been mentioned in chapter 4, above, in the discussion of Ephrem’s version of Marcionite cosmology. In this scheme the Stranger must come down from His heaven ‘above’ the Creator, and Ephrem presents this as a violent intrusion.<sup>256</sup> Drijvers argues<sup>257</sup> that these various references suggest a general attitude among Marcionites, or at least those contemporaneous with Ephrem; “at least according to the Marcionites Ephrem knew, the Stranger descended to the world to make war with the Creator—He came like a warrior—to bring the souls up to the heavens of the Stranger.”<sup>258</sup>

To the orthodox, such an arrangement appeared to be a theft or a spoil. The Marcionites no doubt felt that, given the poverty of the Creator’s realm, and the freedom offered by the Stranger, this ‘theft’ was a justified, even merciful, act of complete love. Megethius defends this point in the *Dialogue of Adamantius*: when his opponent argues that “The Good God such as you refer to will be founded upon evil since it is he who is actually evil, instead of Him whose property the Alien takes possession of violently,” Megethius responds, “He did not commit robbery, but taking pity He sent the Son Who being good, out of goodness liberated us.”<sup>259</sup> This explanation, by and large, did not satisfy the opponents of Marcionism, and polemics describing the Stranger as an unjust warrior or a thief persisted. Megethius’ opponent emphasizes precisely the problematic seized upon by Epiphanius and Ephrem, above, and we will see below that Tertullian will use it as well: there is a problem if the Stranger, being perfectly good, simply comes and takes what is not His, even if He does so out of compassion.

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<sup>255</sup> Drijvers, “Warrior and Merchant,” 77 (Summarizing Ephrem, *Diatesseron Commentary*, 14, 9.)

<sup>256</sup> Ephrem, *Prose Refutations*, 2. 17.

<sup>257</sup> Drijvers, “Warrior and Merchant,” 78.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid. cf. Ephrem, *Prose Refutations*, 1.53, “The Stranger like a man of war was able to come,” apparently another direct quotation from a Marcionite argument.

<sup>259</sup> *DA*, 3.

#### 6.4: Jesus the Merchant

The persistence of these refutations even in works as relatively late as Ephrem suggests that the Marcionites did not simply give up this line of argumentation—certainly, in their perception, the Stranger was completely capable of, and justified in, seizing the unhappy prisoners of the Creator and liberating them to eternal life<sup>260</sup>— but alongside this tradition, and, we may assume, possibly engendered by opposition to it, another argument existed. This approach aimed to portray Jesus as a merchant, engaging in a lawful transaction with the Creator and paying the price of His death in order to receive ownership of souls. Returning to Ephrem’s refutation of the Marcionite exegesis of the Transfiguration pericope, following his rhetorical question as to whether Jesus met with Moses and Elijah to do war, he further wonders “Or were they with Him (i.e. Jesus) to say to Him: ‘If thou art really buying, in order to buy mankind, what is the price of mankind?’”<sup>261</sup> Eznik of Kolb goes into greater detail.<sup>262</sup> In his account, the Creator ignorantly put the Stranger [Jesus] to death and was confuted by His own Law, demanding that a murderer pay the price for the crime with His own life. Jesus then bartered with the Creator; in exchange for the life of the Creator, the Stranger was allowed to take away any souls which would choose to follow Him.

There can be no doubt that the writings of Paul, the great inspiration of Marcion, figured heavily into the discussion regarding the purchasing of souls.<sup>263</sup> Such passages as “You were purchased [ἡγοράσθητε] at a price”<sup>264</sup> must have made the point very clearly for Marcionites; Harnack also notes Galatians 3:13, “Christ has bought us up [ἐξηγόρασεν] from the curse of the Law, having become for us a curse”<sup>265</sup> and suggests<sup>266</sup> that Marcion replaced ‘loved’ with ‘purchased’ at 2:20, altering the reading to “The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of

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<sup>260</sup> Harnack, *Marcion*, 86.

<sup>261</sup> Ephrem, *Prose Refutations*, 2.40.88, 46-89, 9.

<sup>262</sup> See Robert P. Casey, “The Armenian Marcionites and the Diatesseron” 187-188. See also Francois de Blois’ helpful summary and comparison of Ephrem and Eznik on this point, in his “Dualism in Iranian and Christian Traditions,” 9. On Christ’s death as a ransom see also *Pan.*, 42.8.2.

<sup>263</sup> De Blois, “Dualism in Iranian and Christian Traditions,” 9.

<sup>264</sup> 1 Corinthians 6:20.

<sup>265</sup> Gal. 3:13. My translation.

<sup>266</sup> Harnack, *Marcion*, 87.

God, who [\*purchased] me and gave himself for me.”<sup>267</sup> This seems to be the sense in the *Dialogue of Adamantius*, where Megethius is reported to claim “From sin itself Christ purchased us.”<sup>268</sup> The argument was effective both in that it gave apostolic authority to the Marcionite claim and in that it also emphasized that the Creator and the Stranger cannot have been the same God, or else the purchase of which Paul speaks would not make sense. “To such a degree was Christ an alien, to those [to] whom He appeared, and again, Christ to the Creator God, that Paul said ‘Christ purchased us’. It is obvious that He was an alien, for nobody at any time purchases what is their own.”<sup>269</sup> Epiphanius criticizes the same argument:

[Marcion] says, 'If we were His, He would not 'buy' what was His own. He entered someone else's world as a 'buyer' to redeem us, since we were not His. For we were someone else's creation, and He therefore 'bought' us at the price of His own life.'<sup>270</sup>

This argument therefore figures Paul into the discussion, avoids opening the Stranger to a charge of thievery, and provides further evidence for the alien nature of the Stranger.

As mentioned above, however, the Marcionites apparently did not simply abandon or downplay the language of warfare and emphasize the language of purchase; this is contrary to the argument of Harnack that the greater might of the Stranger was required “only as a proof”<sup>271</sup> and that the actual salvation itself operated purely along the lines of a purchase. As we have seen from the above, these two Marcionite arguments must have been together since nearly the very beginning; they were discussed side-by-side in by Epiphanius, Ephrem, and the *Dialogue of Adamantius*. Ephrem even laments the contradictory nature of the two arguments and wonders at the absurdity of using both at once:

But since the followers of Marcion were ashamed to be sponsors for the term ‘violent robbery’ (as applicable) in the case of the Stranger, they have used with reference to Him the term ‘purchase in humble fashion’, and because they are refuted in the matter of the purchase, they have used with reference to Him

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<sup>267</sup> Gal. 2:20 (NIV, modified).

<sup>268</sup> *DA.*, 27.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>270</sup> *Pan.*, 42.8.1-2.

<sup>271</sup> Harnack, *Marcion*, p. 87.



the term 'might' so that when it is asserted against them that He did violence they say that He merely purchased, and when again it is asserted against them that the Maker did not wish to sell His possessions they say that He (the Stranger) is mightier than He (the Maker). Each of the two assertions therefore annuls the other.<sup>272</sup>

Drijvers therefore argues that the two variant explanations constitute "Marcion's wording of the paradox of Christian belief."<sup>273</sup> The Stranger purchases souls with His death and thereby overthrows the Law; the two are the same event. He is the superior power, capable of taking anything of the Creator's by force, and yet, to use Harnack's words, He "chose the way of fairness."<sup>274</sup> This paradox, judging from the sources above, appears to have been at the heart of the Marcionite understanding of salvation.

To summarize the above discussion, it can be seen that from a Marcionite point of view, salvation consists of the following: (1) Only the soul is resurrected; the body, as being essentially inhuman, entirely a work of the Creator from evil matter, is not saved. (2) The Stranger does not judge in offering His salvation; He wills that all souls be saved, and His offer of salvation is available to all who choose to accept it, past, present, and future. Those who do not accept the gift, particularly the Creator's 'righteous ones', may reject it out of loyalty to the Creator or suspiciousness about the 'deal'. By their own choice they will languish in the Creator's underworld until the end of His *saeculum*, and then they are destroyed.<sup>275</sup> (3) The Stranger's salvation is conceptualized as an act of war as well as a lawful purchase; these two lines of argumentation complement each other and are present side-by-side in Marcionite discussion, much to the chagrin of the heresiologists, who find the juxtaposition of these ideas to be paradoxical. It remains now to be seen how Tertullian himself judges the Marcionite ideas of salvation and whether or not he represents these findings correctly.

#### 6.5: Tertullian, Marcion, and Epicurus: A Matter of Consistency

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<sup>272</sup> Ephrem, *Prose Refutations*, 2.60-61, 132, 30-133, 12.

<sup>273</sup> Drijvers, "Warrior and Merchant," 82.

<sup>274</sup> Harnack, *Marcion*, p. 87.

<sup>275</sup> See Chapter 5.

In reporting the Marcionite claim that “For our God one work suffices, that by means of His great and unique goodness He has set men free,”<sup>276</sup> Tertullian draws attention to what he feels is a concise expression of all the problems of the Marcionite Stranger. The phrase illustrates a crucial difference in thought between Tertullian and the Marcionites, one which we have already seen in Tertullian’s justification of the Creator. For the Marcionites, the Creator is found to be embarrassingly contradictory: He favours some humans over others, He allows for sin without interfering and then judges the sinner harshly, He condemns sin and commands His people to commit sinful actions.<sup>277</sup> After the parable of the evil tree which produces evil fruits, He is Himself guilty of the very sins for which he later punishes humans. His creation, as we have seen, is called together out of chaotic matter, divisible and destructible. The Stranger, on the other hand, is alien to all of these distasteful contradictions. He is purely good<sup>278</sup> and performs only a single action. His salvation purifies the human of the contrariness of the Creator, from His material bodies to His impossible Law. The simple goodness of the Stranger is the antithesis to the contrary actions of the Creator, Who is shown to be at odds with Himself, much like the world He creates.

Tertullian holds the opposite view, seeing a divine completeness in what the Marcionites consider a distasteful contrariness. The same Creator, for Tertullian, operates according to both goodness and justice, using evils as corrective tools toward the end of goodness, and thereby calling humans with free will toward perfection of their beings: “So, in short, would the man be established in goodness if... [man] was found to be good as it were by a nature which had become his own.”<sup>279</sup> The Stranger, on the other hand, Who by His nature is incapable of

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<sup>276</sup> *AM*, 1.16. My translation.

<sup>277</sup> Such as the theft of gold and treasure from the Egyptians before the Exodus, to which the Marcionites were apparently quite fond of drawing attention as an example of the Creator promoting sinful activity; we find it in Irenaeus (*AH*, 4.30), the *Dialogues of Adamantius* (*DA*, 10), and Tertullian (*AM*, 2.20.1-2). Tertullian called the Marcionite interpretation of the Egyptian spoils one of the “darknesses of blasphemy” (*tenebras blasphemiae*). (*Ibid.*)

<sup>278</sup> *AM*, 1.25.

<sup>279</sup> *AM*, 2.6. The sense is that in exercising free will in order to escape humanity’s inherent sinful nature, man’s goodness would be reckoned to him as his own doing (because he willed it) and therefore would not be due to God’s compelling him to be good. The reverse argument is strongly

bestowing anything but forgiveness and compassion, offers no punishment and therefore nothing capable of perfecting the human.<sup>280</sup> A God utterly without variance is restrained by His nature; He cannot even offer a complete resurrection, as the Marcionites themselves admit that a large portion of the distinct nature of a human, the body, must be discarded at resurrection because its chaotic and changing nature is at odds with the Stranger's unity and eternity.<sup>281</sup> In the end, the Marcionites have left themselves with half a God, choosing to worship only one aspect of the true God who ordains the world through a harmony of opposition.<sup>282</sup> Tertullian laments their defective vision: "*O praestigia magna etiam promissionis!*" ("What a hollow pretence of so great a promise!")<sup>283</sup>

Tertullian's emphasis on topics such as simplicity and contradiction, as well as activity and inactivity, likely stems from his opposition to philosophy. As John G. Gager indicates,<sup>284</sup> Tertullian sees a close relationship between Marcionism and philosophy, at one point referring to Marcion as "a wild animal more acceptable to philosophers than to Christians."<sup>285</sup> Ultimately, Tertullian considers all heresy to stem from philosophy,<sup>286</sup> and where Marcion is concerned, error was first introduced through Epicurean philosophy, as discussed above. Interestingly, as Gager indicates, the root of Marcion's point of departure from orthodox monotheism is a typically Epicurean argument, which we have discussed above as the Marcionite interpretation of the evil tree which produces evil fruit. In short, the Marcionites claim that because the Creator does not prevent evils, He must be either productive of them or at least complicit in them, two possibilities which, if He is omnipotent, amount to the same thing. Gager shows that this same problem is raised in very similar terms by Sextus Empiricus, as well as Lactantius, who attributes it to

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implied as well; Tertullian's theodicy absolves God of blame for sin precisely because free will displaces the responsibility for it over to the human.

<sup>280</sup> *AM*, 1.27.

<sup>281</sup> *AM*, 1.24.

<sup>282</sup> *AM*, 2.29.

<sup>283</sup> *AM*, 3.24.

<sup>284</sup> Gager, "Marcion and Philosophy," 53.59.

<sup>285</sup> *AM*, 1.1.

<sup>286</sup> Tertullian, "*The Prescription Against Heretics*," ch. 7.

Epicurus.<sup>287</sup> The similar forms of the arguments suggest that Marcion had some philosophical background of a type possibly similar to Epicureanism.<sup>288</sup> Tertullian claims that these ideas, which Marcion received from some outside authority (Cerdo, or the nebulous "*aliis argumentis*"<sup>289</sup> which probably refer to philosophical arguments, as shown above) and which problematize the Creator's actions in the world, lead directly to the conclusion that the higher God has no involvement with the world at all. Tertullian states explicitly that this is what the Marcionites are doing: "[H]e has presumed to dignify by the name of Christ some god out of the school of Epicurus, to the end that 'that which is blessed and incorruptible should give no trouble either to itself or to anything else'"<sup>290</sup> Attacking the philosophical root of the problem, then, Tertullian in his criticism of the Stranger returns again and again to the questions of activity and lack thereof, changelessness and contrariness, wholeness and partiality. His most general criticism of the Stranger aims to show the same incompleteness and changeability in the Stranger which the Marcionites deride in the Creator, thereby showing that, in fact, it is necessary for the two to comprise a single God, Who *is* the Creator when properly understood.

Tertullian employs this strategy against most of the Marcionite tenets that have been indicated in the first part of this chapter. We have already mentioned his criticism of the Marcionite idea that salvation is of the soul alone: the body, which Tertullian considers to be integral to the human being, is not saved, indicating a discrimination and incompleteness in the supposedly perfect God who shows no judgement. Tertullian makes this quite clear: "[T]hose whom he does save are seen to have their salvation incomplete, and this proves His goodness is incomplete: for they are saved as far as the soul, having perished in the flesh, since according to him the flesh does not rise again."<sup>291</sup> He goes on to show that because the soul causes the body to sin, the Stranger in fact rescues the sinful, and not the innocent, part of

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<sup>287</sup> Gager, "Marcion and Philosophy," 56.

<sup>288</sup> Gager, "Marcion and Philosophy," 57.

<sup>289</sup> *AM*, 1.2.

<sup>290</sup> *AM*, 1.25 (As the editor notes, the quotation is from Epicurus himself, *Diog. Laert.* X.139.)

<sup>291</sup> *AM*, 1.24.

man.<sup>292</sup> Here Tertullian is putting cracks in the idea of a wholly good and perfect God, without judgement; even in the very act of salvation itself—the Stranger’s only act—the Stranger proves Himself to act incompletely, and even to judge, moreover to judge unfairly. Tertullian concludes his remarks on the subject: “You make profession of a god Who is good and nothing more; yet you cannot prove the perfect goodness of one Who does not perfectly set you free.”<sup>293</sup> Tertullian was therefore certainly aware of the Marcionite claim that only the soul is saved; however his representation of this belief is not quite accurate. The Marcionites, as shown above, did not consider the body to comprise part of the true nature of the human; it is rather something artificial, a detestable mechanism of the sphere of matter joined to a spirit of the Creator. It is therefore no less to be despised than the rest of the Creator’s world, and certainly not an intrinsic part of the human being. Marcionites therefore did not believe that a human being is cleft in two when the soul is taken from the body; rather, the spirit, the true person, is set free from a kind of prison. We can only speculate as to whether Tertullian’s representation here is due to misinformation or polemic, however it seems highly likely that it is the latter. As we have seen above and in previous chapters, Tertullian is familiar with philosophy and considers it the cause of heresy, including Marcion’s heresy; it is unlikely that he would consider this belief anything other than the sinister influence of Greek metempsychosis, which he counters with the decidedly orthodox conception of the resurrection of both body and soul.

Tertullian is also aware of the Marcionite argument that the salvation offered by the Stranger, as a gift from simple compassion, does not require correct action on the part of the human. This is the belief which the Marcionites illustrated so vividly, in their portrayals of criminals and Egyptians fleeing the Creator’s hell with the Stranger, while the Creator’s righteous were left behind due to misguided loyalty or suspicion. Here Tertullian makes a cutting point; the fact that the righteous, along with the rest of the non-Marcionites, are not saved amounts to a judgement on the Stranger’s part, regardless of their wishes:

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<sup>292</sup> Ibid.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid.

What will happen on that day to every sinner? [The Marcionites] answer that he will be cast away, as it were out of sight. Is not this an act of judgement? He is judged worthy to be cast away—evidently by a judgement of condemnation... and a sentence like this can only be passed by one offended and indignant, a punisher of wrongdoing—in short, a judge.<sup>294</sup>

There are two problems here for the Marcionites, as Tertullian sees it; the first, as illustrated above, is the fact that the Stranger is apparently shown to cast some kind of judgement upon human souls, a charge that the Marcionites, for obvious reasons, cannot abide in their higher God. Secondly, because most people are not Marcionites, this is another indication of the incompleteness of the salvation:

For not all men are being saved, fewer indeed than all the Creator's Jews and Christians. So that as a majority are perishing, how can you maintain the perfection of goodness which is for the greater part inactive, to a few men some small thing, to the majority nothing at all, surrendering to perdition, part cause of destruction?<sup>295</sup>

Here we see an argument which is typical of Tertullian's criticism of the Stranger; this is a reapplication of the 'evil tree' argument, in which Tertullian repurposes Marcion's philosophical problematic of evil in order to bring accusation against the Stranger on the same terms. If the Stranger does not provide salvation to everyone, is He not by Marcion's own reasoning responsible for the damnation of those He does not save? We will see this again below in Tertullian's discussion of the history of salvation.

Another point remains on the question of right action on the part of humans. Tertullian suggests that the Marcionite Stranger is inconsistent with Himself in that He proscribes behaviour but does not punish transgression. "If he displays neither hostility nor wrath... I cannot see how His moral Law, that more extensive moral Law, can have stability... Why does He forbid the commission of an act He does not penalize when committed?"<sup>296</sup> Tertullian raises the point again in his discussion of the Creator, where he explicitly states that the Marcionite response to the Creator's

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<sup>294</sup> *AM*, 1.28.

<sup>295</sup> *AM*, 1.24. Ernest Evans suggests that this particular argument ("why the goodness of his good God falls short of saving all men") is derived from Irenaeus, *AH*, 4.51.1 (*AM*, 65, note 24).

<sup>296</sup> *AM*, 1.26. This is a point raised by Eznik as well; see Casey, "The Armenian Marcionites and the Diatesseron," 193.

justice stems from a problematic insistence on consistency in a God.<sup>297</sup> Again, this represents the same two-fold problem discussed above: if the Stranger prohibits something, He is a judge, but if He does not punish, He is a liar and at variance with Himself.<sup>298</sup> Tertullian goes on to question why Marcionites bother to avoid evil at all, and reports Marcion's answer: "*Absit, inquis, absit.*"<sup>299</sup> ("Let it not be, you say, let it not be.") Harnack saw in this response "a religio-historical document of the first rank"<sup>300</sup> through which the believer is led to understand that good action is the nature of the redeemed human and requires no justification for its presence and no punishment to keep it in line. The argument is similar to Pauline discussions of the Law as a pedagogue,<sup>301</sup> and other points at which he criticizes antinomianism; the fact that the Law is no longer applicable does not mean that Christians should not lead moral lives: *absit*,<sup>302</sup> moral behaviour is a sign of the true Christian, one which follows naturally from redemption. Marcion's stance here clearly reflects the morality of Paul, who also wrote "All things are lawful for me, but not all things are beneficial."<sup>303</sup> Were Tertullian not at odds with Marcion, he may have even found himself in agreement with him on this point, as it is not a contentious one from an orthodox point of view; as it stands, however, Tertullian uses it to demonstrate again the inconsistency of the Stranger. His criticism at all points returns to the issue of consistency, which the Marcionites use to claim the higher nature of the Stranger: "Neither His character nor His condition nor His nature nor any activity of His do I find consistent."<sup>304</sup>

We have seen above that the orthodox tradition very generally accuses the Stranger of theft or spoil in His action of redeeming the Creator's souls; Tertullian seizes upon this criticism as well, but also brings another note of inconsistency to the argument. Not only does the Stranger act like a thief in taking away the Creator's

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<sup>297</sup> *AM*, 2.23.

<sup>298</sup> *AM*, 1.27.

<sup>299</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>300</sup> Harnack, *Marcion*, 89.

<sup>301</sup> Cf. Galatians 3:13ff.

<sup>302</sup> My advisor, Dr. Treiger, indicates quite correctly that Paul himself would have said 'μη γένουτο.'

<sup>303</sup> 1 Corinthians 6:12. See also David T. Jull, "The Law as Our Pedagogue," *Journal of Biblical Literature* vol. 105, no. 3 (1986) pp. 481-498.

<sup>304</sup> *AM*, 1.28.

souls, but despite His own goodness, His taking of souls in this way causes humans to sin against their owner and incenses the wrath of the Creator against them.

No better [than a kidnapper] is Marcion's God, breaking His way into a world not His own, stealing man from God, son from father... I should reckon no man more presumptuous than the one who in one God's water is baptized for another God, who towards one God's sky spreads out his hands to a different God...Who is this God, so good that by Him a man is made bad, so kindly disposed to that man that he causes another God, the man's own Master, to be incensed against Him?<sup>305</sup>

Tertullian also calls attention to the Transfiguration, as would Ephrem a century later; he apparently refers directly to the Marcionite argument that some form of violence or struggle took place on the mountain: "[W]hen He [Jesus] withdraws into the mountain you [Marcion] permit Him to be seen in the company of Moses and Elijah, though he had come as their overthrewer (*destructor*)."<sup>306</sup> Likewise, the language of 'invading' another's world as a violent conqueror ('like a man of war') is seen in Tertullian as well, where he questions the cloud on the mountain. Even here he takes the opportunity to question not only the morality but also the consistency of the Stranger, who apparently has no creations of His own, but somehow manages to produce this cloud:

[N]o one can doubt that this was condensed out of the Creator's air, unless perhaps He had brought His own clouds down thither, because He had himself forced a way through the Creator's heaven: or perhaps He had only borrowed the fog for His own use.<sup>307</sup>

Tertullian therefore shows his familiarity with Marcionite conceptions of the Stranger as a 'man of war,' and while he levels the same fairly simple ethical arguments that we see in the later tradition, he also takes the opportunity to illustrate the inconsistency of the supposedly constant Stranger.

Tertullian does not draw attention to the viewpoint of Marcionites that some kind of purchase took place, during the Transfiguration or otherwise. Rather, in

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<sup>305</sup> *AM*, 1.24.

<sup>306</sup> *AM*, 4.22.

<sup>307</sup> *Ibid.* The language of 'borrowing' the Creator's material elements mirrors other moments at which Tertullian criticizes the Marcionites for their duplicitous condemnation of matter while they make use of it in their daily lives and their sacraments (cf. *AM*, 1.22).



criticism of what the Marcionites believe actually transpires in salvation, he focuses entirely on the problems inherent in the idea that the Stranger took the souls away by force. We can only speculate as to the cause of this omission. It is possible that Tertullian had not himself encountered these arguments, although as we have seen above, they seem to have been present in Marcionite salvific doctrine since the early days; Harnack believes that they must be traced directly to Marcion himself.<sup>308</sup> Given that Tertullian's criticism of the Stranger focuses so heavily on undermining the Marcionite arguments for the consistency of their God, it is possible that Tertullian chose to focus on 'warrior' language in order to emphasize the inconsistency which he found there. It is also possible that the language of 'purchase' was somewhat embarrassing to Tertullian given the standard Marcionite argument that 'one does not purchase one's own property.' The straightforwardness of this point, combined with Pauline language regarding salvation as a purchase (including the unambiguous word ἐξηγόρασεν) may have unsettled Tertullian, who relies very heavily on biblical exegesis to prove his points. However, with no evidence from Tertullian on this point, we cannot know for sure. The issue is made even more uncertain by the fact that Tertullian clearly *knew* about this aspect of Marcionite soteriology, as he contrasts it with the docetic position, as we saw in the previous chapter.

Tertullian's criticism of the inconsistency of the Stranger is expressed most clearly in his discussion of the history of salvation. Tertullian here draws attention to a problem which the later heresiologists seem to neglect: why did the Stranger wait so long to redeem humanity? The issue opens a wide range of problems for Tertullian, primarily in the area of divine consistency. Discussing the Stranger "in terms of that for which He is thought an improvement on the Creator,"<sup>309</sup> Tertullian argues that the goodness of the Stranger, which is His sole attribute, should have been in evidence from the beginning, or else He is proven to be capable of change. If the Marcionites hold that the Stranger is entirely immune to passions and to changes of will, aspects which they find highly damning in the Creator, they must explain

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<sup>308</sup> Harnack, *Marcion*, 87.

<sup>309</sup> *AM*, 1.22.

how it is that He can remain complacent with the Creator's *saeculum* for most of human history, only to reveal Himself for the first time with the appearance of Jesus. Eternal, infinite goodness cannot restrain itself. Tertullian writes,

Now when I take a historical view, ever since the beginning of material existence, ever since the first emergence of those causes along with which it ought to have been in evidence, [this goodness] nowhere appears in continuous action from thence forward, as there was need for it to function... It is not possible for a God to be incompetent of anything—especially of putting His natural abilities into operation: for if these are under restraint, so as to have no free course, they cannot be natural. Nature can take no vacation from itself.<sup>310</sup>

Tertullian therefore questions both the morality and the consistency of the Stranger, Who, as we have seen above, fails to redeem all people, and also displays His changeable will by deciding at a certain point in history to interfere in the Creator's works. Tertullian sees this as an embarrassment from which the Marcionites cannot escape, a core doctrinal point in their theology which is completely at odds with the philosophy of divine goodness and unchangeability by which it is justified. The Stranger, Who the Marcionites argue is greater than the Creator precisely in His changelessness and His immunity to passion and desire, shows that He is both subject to desire (the desire to save souls) as well as change (in that after a long period of inactivity He decides suddenly to intervene):

For every act of will is at the instigation of desire: no man can wish for something without desiring it. Also the will is accompanied by interestedness: for no man can will and desire anything without being interested in it. Consequently, when He began to will and to desire with a view to man's salvation, He at once caused concern to himself and to others, though Epicurus disapproves, while Marcion recommends.<sup>311</sup>

With the explicit mention of Epicurus here, we see Tertullian striking against what he sees to be the philosophical root of Marcionism, and the introduction of a non-Christian theological idea which cannot but pervert the Christian context into which it was imported. If the Stranger can feel emotions, as demonstrated by His salvific

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<sup>310</sup> Ibid.

<sup>311</sup> *AM*, 1.25.

act, “what could such a one have in common with Epicurus, with whom neither he nor Christians have any affinity?”<sup>312</sup>

The Stranger’s ‘hesitation,’ aside from proving this God’s inconsistency in terms of will and desire, exposes another problem, which we have briefly mentioned above. Tertullian’s approach often uses Marcionite arguments against themselves in order to disprove the Marcionites using logic that they cannot refute. Nowhere in the discussion of the Stranger is this more evident than in the arguments regarding this ‘hesitation.’ As we have seen above, Marcionites used a typically Epicurean argument regarding the presence of evil in the world. In short, the argument is that if God is omnipotent and allows evil, the guilt for that evil must in the last analysis fall to God for His failure to prevent it. As a result, an omnipotent God with the power to avert evil cannot be considered omnibenevolent if evil exists; the God is guilty by reason of being capable of preventing evil and not willing to do so. This argument, which Marcion incorporated into the parable of the good and evil trees, forms the basis for the Marcionite criticism of the Creator and the notion of a good God who must be wholly detached from the world of evils. However, as Tertullian notes, when this argument is applied to the Stranger, His apparent hesitation to put an end to the unjust punishment of souls cannot but impute to Him the same guilt which the Marcionites lay at the feet of the Creator:

As then it is admitted that at the beginning the goodness of that God was under restraint—for not at the beginning did He set man free—and that the restraint was due to His will and not to His incapacity, well then, this determination to place goodness under restraint must be found to be the extremity of malice. For is there anything so malicious as to refuse to do good when you have the power, to put usefulness on the rack, to allow wrong to continue? Thus the whole indictment they bring against the Creator has to be transferred to the account of that One who, by this check on His own goodness, has become a party to the other’s savageries. One in whose power it is to prevent a thing happening is held to blame for it when it does happen.<sup>313</sup>

Tertullian therefore sees in the hesitation of the Stranger a host of problems which render very unstable the Marcionite claims about the nature of true divinity. The Stranger shows variance with Himself, a capacity to be swayed by desire, and a

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<sup>312</sup> Ibid.

<sup>313</sup> *AM*, 1.22.

capacity for change, all of these being charges that the Marcionites raise against the Creator. He also displays a deficiency of His primary characteristic, goodness, in that His goodness does not operate eternally but comes into existence at a certain point in history.<sup>314</sup> His earlier failure to intervene and stop the Creator from tormenting His creations makes Him guilty under precisely the same rubric that the Marcionites use to condemn the Creator. Beyond all else the Stranger is shown to be inconsistent; His action is neither complete nor eternal, nor is it compatible with the Stranger's reputed goodness.

#### 6.6: Conclusion

In summary of Tertullian's arguments against the Stranger's salvation, we find that his representation is quite complete and mostly accurate. Returning to our earlier list of the Marcionite tenets regarding the act of salvation, we find that Tertullian accurately represents nearly everything derived from other sources. He understands the singular action of the Stranger, the resurrection of souls and not bodies, and the antinomian conclusions which allow for the salvation of the enemies of the Creator and the flouters of His Law. He is also aware of Marcionite salvific doctrine holding that the Stranger somehow wrested souls from their owner by force, and indicates his awareness that the Transfiguration event played some role in this. We see one minor problem in Tertullian's discussion of the resurrection of soul alone; his criticism on this point is based on the assumption that body and soul are both integral to the human and that therefore the resurrection of soul alone is 'incomplete'. As Harnack shows, and the heresiologists support, for the Marcionites, the body's material nature makes it essentially inhuman and therefore not worthy of redemption. The loss of the body is the removal of an undesirable and artificial addition to the human spirit, and therefore—on Marcionite view—it is not a cleaving of the human being in two, as Tertullian sees it. There is also a major omission in that Tertullian does not address the Marcionite language of redemption as a purchase; as discussed above, we can only speculate as to why this was not included,

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<sup>314</sup> Ibid.

but its close adherence to the Pauline epistles shared by Tertullian may have played a role in this.

More generally, as we have seen, Tertullian's criticism of the Stranger focuses on his perception of the presence of Epicurean philosophy in Marcion's theology. He sees this as the root cause of both the Marcionite criticism of the Creator as well as their understanding of the nature of the Stranger: the Creator is bound up too closely with His world of variance and He allows Himself to become varied as well, leading to the evils of the world and His unjust punishment for sin. The Stranger, as completely alien to the world, does not act this way; He is completely changeless and infinitely good, having no guilt for the evils permitted in the world and no desire to judge humans, either harshly or leniently, for their sins. Tertullian's criticism of the Stranger circles back at every point to this philosophical dualism, and where he uses arguments that are not used by the other heresiologists, issues of consistency and infinite goodness are always being criticised. Thus, for Tertullian, the resurrection of soul alone is incomplete—a first indication of the deficiency of the Stranger's assumed consistency. The Stranger, by not giving salvation to all of humanity, acts incompletely in His saving act and acts as a judge—for Tertullian, the Marcionite argument that salvation is only withheld from those who do not accept it is not enough to obviate this guilt. Moreover, in His professing an ethical code and then failing to punish accordingly, He displays a variance within Himself. In the act of taking souls from the Creator, the Stranger proves Himself to be a 'man of war,' which Tertullian considers to be impossible if He is wholly good. Beyond this, He encourages His followers to abandon their rightful owner and profess faith to another, while still making use of the Creator's elements, in the 'cloud' at the transfiguration, and in the rites performed by His adherents. He is guilty therefore of coercing humans to act unrighteously and dishonestly, a charge that the Marcionites have already levelled against the Creator and another instance of inconsistency, a 'wholly good' God Who apparently condones evil. The problem of inconsistency is most thoroughly explicated in Tertullian's consideration of the history of salvation—another point neglected by the other heresiologists; here, as we have seen, Tertullian draws attention to numerous inconsistencies in the Stranger, primary

among these being that the suddenness of the salvific act suggests that the Stranger is capable of desire and change, and that the Stranger's failure to act earlier makes Him a culpable party in the Creator's savagery, according to the same apparently Epicurean-influenced argument that the Marcionites use to besmirch the Creator. In short, Tertullian's treatment of salvation offers a generally accurate portrayal of Marcionite theology, though it is clearly one with a serious anti-philosophical agenda not fully embraced by the later tradition.

## Chapter 7: Conclusion: Tertullian as Transmitter

### 7.1: Where Tertullian Was Accurate

Upon first browsing Tertullian's *Adversus Marcionem*, I was taken aback by the vitriolic language and the real anger that I was seeing in this man I knew to be a revered figure in the history of the Church. Perhaps this is an indication of my general sympathy for heretics, but in that first reading I suspected that Tertullian's treatment of Marcionism might be no more than a spiteful bullying. Tertullian took real joy in mocking his opponent, and his opponent's homeland in particular; in the very second paragraph of his first book he wrote, "Even its situation would prevent you from reckoning Pontus hospitable: as though ashamed of its own barbarism it has set itself at a distance from our more civilized shores."<sup>315</sup> Lines like this abound in this text; Tertullian never seemed to miss a chance to flavour his criticism of Marcion with a slur about his homeland. When you've read enough of him, you learn to spot them coming.

How could such a document, so clearly and unapologetically biased, possibly provide any kind of reasonable information about such a hated opponent? I was sure that I would find holes in every argument, and thereby vindicate a misunderstood Pontic heretic against the unfair attacks of his spiteful and petty *accusator*. I was in for another surprise as my research progressed: Tertullian, for all his mockery and all his anger, was an undeniably accurate reporter. I had a short time to learn an important lesson: the mere fact that someone is angry does not mean that they are wrong.

The first issue dealt with was that of the Creator's nature as evil and/or just. As I indicated in Chapter I, modern sentiment now sees Marcion as forging a clear distinction between justice and goodness, represented by his two Gods. This is, without a doubt, an integral part of the Marcionite conceptions of the nature of the Creator, especially in the later tradition. However, another aspect was found in the tradition, holding that the Creator is evil by His essence. Harnack effectively wrote this off, and it was neglected by scholarship until quite recently. The detail did not

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<sup>315</sup> *AM*, 1.1.3

fly past Tertullian, however (who was perhaps more open to the possibility than Harnack was). Tertullian focused on this aspect of the Creator moreso than His justice, reflecting the development of these traditions through the history of Marcionism and indicating, as the earlier sources agree, that Marcionism itself probably began with a simple good / evil dichotomy which gradually developed into a tradition which put more emphasis on justice. This argument, supplied by Sebastian Moll only recently, seems to me the only reasonable reconstruction of the development of the dual traditions of evil Creator and just Creator; it all but disappeared after Harnack labelled Marcion an 'exclusive Biblical scholar' whose main inspiration was the Pauline rhetoric of works and faith. Moll's hypothesis for the gradual introduction of the element of justice into a system already focused mainly on evil fits the chronology of the sources, and Tertullian's representation slides neatly into this reconstruction as well. There appears to be no doubt that on this particular chicken-and-egg issue, the evil came before the justice, just as Tertullian appears to have suggested.

The discussion of the Creator in His role as the architect of the universe led me to conclude that Tertullian was largely accurate here as well. Tertullian knew that Marcion's cosmology included pre-existent evil matter, and he appears to have even traced its source to contemporaneous Platonic philosophy. As the work of Drijvers and others indicates, Marcionite cosmology owed much to Platonism, especially as regards prime matter and the Demiurge. Here again we have an implicit refutation of Harnack, whose conception of Marcion's *Flucht vor dem philosophischen Denken* established a precedent wherein Marcion was imagined to have absolutely no relationship with or knowledge of the philosophical environment in which he lived. Tertullian knew better, and for that matter so did Irenaeus, Clement, and Hippolytus. Certainly the ancient Church was perhaps a little overzealous in assigning philosophical root causes to every varied form of heresy with which they were presented, but on this point at least they seem to have hit the nail on the head. Marcion *was*, in one of his many roles, a philosopher; the tradition which bore his name gives proof of that. When Tertullian called Marcion "a wild



animal more acceptable to philosophers than to Christians,”<sup>316</sup> he was not simply raging at a hated opponent; a real kernel of truth is contained in those words, belligerent though they may be.

Where Tertullian discussed the alien nature of the Stranger, we find that he was mostly accurate as well. He had a clear and unmistakable grasp of the newness of the Stranger, which was expressed by separate Scriptures, separate Gods, separate messiahs and separate afterlives. He knew of the Marcionite argument that, in contrast to the Creator, the Stranger created of nothing at all, not even human souls. But he was also aware of another tradition which claimed that the Stranger is the ultimate source of ‘invisible things’: souls or a heaven. Finding this piece of information was truly going above and beyond the call of duty, as Tertullian’s orthodox contemporaries saw this variant as a break from the ‘Marcionite’ tradition. Nevertheless the influence is unmistakable, especially in the sect of Apelles, and that Tertullian recognized and mentioned this influence is a testimony to the breadth of his scholarship. Tertullian knew also about the specific conditions of Marcionite asceticism: its vegetarianism and its refusal of marriage (“Is any beaver more self-castrating than this man who has abolished marriage?”<sup>317</sup>). He gave detailed information about the Marcionites’ ritual and chided them for their use of the Creator’s elements in their ceremonies. Tertullian’s discussion of Marcionite docetism was similarly broad and well-argued. He aimed his pen at the weak point formed by the Marcionite insistence on both the phantasmal Jesus and the reality of His passion as the ‘price’ paid to the Creator for human souls. Such an argument clearly indicates that Tertullian spent a good deal of time investigating precisely what docetism meant in the context of the Marcionite tradition specifically, rather than simply importing a criticism of Gnostic docetism, which lacked this weak point in its general assumption that the passion was unnecessary. Such a point indicates that Tertullian was not satisfied simply with classifying Marcion as a docetist and having done with it; to the contrary, he investigated exactly how Marcionite docetism worked, and analyzed his findings against other, unrelated claims of the

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<sup>316</sup> *AM*, 1.1.5.

<sup>317</sup> *Ibid.*

Marcionites in order to make this impressive blow against this aspect of Marcion's theology. Tertullian also knew about the Marcionite concept that Jesus was not the Creator's messiah, and tied it to the excision of the genealogies and birth narratives from Luke's gospel—another striking argument.

In my analysis of Tertullian's representation of Marcionite soteriology I again found that he was mostly accurate. Tertullian knew that the Marcionites believed the Stranger performed only a single action, the salvation of souls alone. He reported on one of the most prominent Marcionite descriptions of the means by which the Stranger took possession of the souls, that is, as a 'warrior', seizing them by force. More importantly, Tertullian struck with great precision time and time again against a philosophical influence on Marcion which he considered 'Epicurean.' He showed how Marcionite conceptions of the goodness of the Stranger involve His utter separation from matter and His complete lack of passion, a placid and unaffected nature which is proper to philosophical divinity. His arguments effectively showed that, despite these similarities, Marcionite theology is not itself compatible with such philosophy: the Stranger waits before acting, a sign of inconsistency or even malice. He saves only the soul and not the body, and He saves only a portion of the humans trapped in the Creator's prison; both are signs of incomplete action. In short, the supposedly eternal Stranger turns out to be capable of change, and His divine placidity is shown to be complicit in destruction in that an earlier action on His part would have spared suffering. This last point turned around the whole Marcionite dialogue about the good and evil trees and laid guilt for human suffering squarely at the feet of the Stranger. Tertullian had clearly learned enough about these concepts to prove a formidable critic.

For all this, Tertullian did make some mistakes in his representation. These can be divided into a few categories: (1) There are some notable omissions, including his omitting of the 'purchase' language in his discussion of salvation and his omitting the Marcionite tenet that the Creator dies at the end of His *saeculum*. (2) Addressing the *Adversus Marcionem* directly to Marcion as he did, Tertullian often synthesized multiple Marcionite traditions and attempted to display them as if they were all part of the theology espoused by Marcion himself. Tertullian was very

concerned with opposing philosophy, and this zeal leads him to mischaracterize some aspects of Marcionite thought. (3) He also had his own theology and his own style of argumentation and discussion, one which often did not fit the Marcionite tradition he is addressing; therefore the Marcionites, not sharing his premises, would have problems with some of his conclusions. (4) Finally, there are a handful of miscellaneous errors and omissions which I think can reasonably be attributed to simple mistakes on Tertullian's part. Let us now examine each of these tendencies.

## 7.2: Omissions

One major omission is that when Tertullian discussed Marcionite conceptions of salvation, he focused entirely on the language identifying the Stranger as a 'warrior' Who takes the souls of humans from the Creator by force. Tertullian, like the heresiologists generally, argued that this is a form of theft. He did not *at this point* refer to the Marcionite belief that the Stranger 'purchased' the souls from the Creator by the death of Jesus. He was not, however, ignorant of this point; as discussed above, he leveraged it very gracefully into his discussion of Marcionite dualism when he suggested that Jesus' phantasmal body made Him unable to experience suffering and death. Why he omitted it at the point of discussing the salvation directly, we can only speculate; I suggested in my analysis of this that Tertullian may have been hesitant to attack such a clearly Pauline idea. It is also possible that he simply realized that portraying the Stranger as a thief as opposed to a merchant would paint Him in a more negative light.

Tertullian also omitted the idea that the Creator would die at the end of His *saeculum*; again, it is difficult to speculate as to the cause for an omission, but if I were to hazard a guess here I would suggest that this has something to do with his argument's casting the Creator as well as the Stranger, for polemical purposes, as a *summum bonum* and therefore eternal. This was not agreed to by the Marcionites themselves, though (as I will discuss below) Tertullian generally assumes that it was. This omission, unlike the omission of the 'purchase' language, may have also been an honest mistake or oversight.

### 7.3: Synthesis and Philosophy

The problem of synthesis is probably Tertullian's most frequent error. I hesitate to even call many of such instances 'errors' because they ultimately do appear to provide generally correct information; that is, Tertullian often fused together two contradictory Marcionite positions, each of which was supported by what seems to be a different strain in the tradition. Thus, for example, Tertullian made reference to arguments that the Creator is evil alongside those indicating that He is just. Both positions are valid and both are represented among Tertullian's Marcionite contemporaries; however, as Moll shows, it is unlikely that Marcion actually conceived of the Creator as 'just'. It is more likely that this was a later addition to Marcionite theology. So, while Tertullian was not exactly in error on either point, the fact that he attributes both positions to Marcion is problematic. The result is a fusion of two ideas which, broadly speaking, represented general Marcionite thought, but probably not that of Marcion himself, as he suggested it does.

Similarly, Tertullian provided both Marcionite explanations for the presence of evil in the world, first that it is caused by the evil in matter and second that it is caused by the devil, which ultimately means that it is caused by the Creator. Again, both positions are supported by other sources, and again, the image that emerges from these sources is a community with varied arguments and differing conclusions. In this case we can go a step further; not only is it a foregone conclusion that Marcion did not hold both views (he probably preferred the former) but it seems that this case is one in which the arguments are mutually exclusive. If evil comes from matter, it cannot come from the Creator, and vice versa, especially since the Creator did not actually create the matter. So it seems unlikely to me that anyone could reasonably hold both views, as Tertullian suggested that Marcion did. Again, though, through this 'error' we are given a wider image of Marcionite belief.

As mentioned above, Tertullian also reported on the two answers given to the question of whether or not the Stranger created anything. Far more divisive than the question of the source of evil in the world, we have proof in the sect of Apelles that the answers to this question actually caused schisms in Marcionism; it is therefore

certain that Marcionite thinkers could not have accepted both, but would have had to decide upon one or the other. For Tertullian to lay them out, side by side, and claim that *both* views are held by Marcion or even by later Marcionites is therefore impossible. Again, as we have seen with the other examples, this error gives Tertullian a chance to relate more information to his readers, and the information itself is not faulty.

Tertullian's focus on philosophy as the root of the Marcionite heresy sometimes succeeds and sometimes does not. He was probably correct when, as I have claimed, he insinuated that there was philosophical influence on the formation of the Marcionite conception of prime matter; the work of Drijvers indicates that this is almost a certainty. As to his claim that the Marcionite conceptions of salvation are influenced by Epicureanism, I remain somewhat unsure on this matter. It is an impressive argument, and there can be no doubt that the Epicurean philosophy as he presents it seems to align nicely with Marcionite theology. No other primary source gives Epicurean philosophy as a source for Marcionism (though it is not unimaginable that Tertullian may have had information that the others did not) but there is no doubt that there was a serious dialogue going on regarding the consequences of activity, placidity, emotion, and affectedness in divine figures. The question remains as to whether these arguments are specific enough to accept that there was a direct influence. It is somewhat more likely to me that Tertullian, acquainted with different philosophical schools of thought, made this connection himself and tailored his discussion around it. Tertullian was also clearly closer to the mark than Hippolytus, who considered Marcion to be primarily influenced by Empedocles.<sup>318</sup> In any case, we have seen that Tertullian held all heresy to be engendered by philosophy, and in his upholding this general rule we should not be surprised to find that he was not always entirely accurate.

#### 7.4: Assumption of Premises and Miscellaneous

Tertullian, in what a cynic might argue was a foreshadowing of Harnack, also read a bit of his own theology into Marcionism. This is seen most clearly in his

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<sup>318</sup> *RH*, 7.17.

arguments regarding the nature of the Stranger. Quite to the contrary of what Marcionites actually held, Tertullian simply assumed that because they used the word 'God', which to him meant the *summum bonum* of the Judeo-Christian tradition, they essentially assented that the Creator is as great as their own God, the Stranger. This is an argument from what he considered 'common sense,' but which must in the last analysis be seen as a kind of mystical vision of the Father of Christ, awareness which is implanted in every soul, as he admitted himself: "The knowledge inherent in the soul since the beginning is God's endowment... It is the God of the Jews that men's souls call God."<sup>319</sup> Tertullian noted almost in passing that the Marcionites did not actually believe that both Gods are equal because they are both called God, but then he stubbornly went on presuming this in the arguments that follow. These sections are probably where he was at his most inaccurate. For instance, he argues that the Stranger is obviously inferior to the Creator because He does not create whereas the 'agreed upon' divinity does. The Marcionites however saw the Demiurge's act of creation as a filthy and vile production, aimed solely towards self-gratification and failing in every way to compare to the higher reality promised by the Stranger. Throughout these arguments Tertullian acknowledged but apparently failed to actually understand that the Marcionites really *did not* consider the Creator to be a 'God' in the same sense that the Stranger is a 'God'; they may have used the same word for both, but there is not a *summum bonum* behind each application of the term. The Stranger is the *summum bonum*, the Creator is merely a corrupt and vainglorious Demiurge.

We see another instance of Tertullian's tendency to let his own theology get in the way when he discusses the salvation of soul alone. To Tertullian, the soul and the body form a unity; both are intrinsic elements to the human composite, and to lack one or the other is to not be truly human. Resurrection therefore *must* include resurrection of the body for Tertullian; if not, the redeemed portion is *not* a complete being, but only a part of one. He used this argument to suggest that the Stranger's salvation is an incomplete one, as it fails to redeem one of the crucial

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<sup>319</sup> *AM*, 1.11.3.

components of the human being. Marcionites, as we have seen from multiple sources, did not agree with Tertullian on this point. For them, the soul was the true and the *complete* human; the body merely an appendage, the most immediate manifestation of the Creator's prison cell. It was fashioned from crude, filthy matter "stuffed with dung" (as Tertullian reports Marcionite anti-material language). Release from the body allows experience of the true self, without the artificial mediation of the Creator's vile matter. Resurrection of the soul alone then was not a 'division of the person' for the Marcionites, as Tertullian suggested. It was, in fact, that which allowed a person to be truly free.

Similarly, while discussing Tertullian's own faith and the issue of matter, it should be noted in passing that there is a stark difference between Tertullian's analysis of the created world and that of the Marcionites. Tertullian believed, not through proofs but through a simple inner conviction, that the world of matter is inherently good. He could not countenance that anyone should see it any other way. The Marcionites, however, appear to have had a negative view of the material world which was equally beyond explanation; to them, the material world shouted its imperfection at every turn. Tertullian therefore hoped for far too much when he assumed that he could lead the Marcionites to accept his own position that the goodness of the world points to the goodness of its Creator; the Marcionites, observing the same world, came to the opposite conclusion, with the same kind of inner conviction, and there is no argument which could mediate this fundamental divide. I mention this not as an error in Tertullian's representation, but perhaps as a flaw in his general approach, and another example of his tendency to hold doggedly to his own personal beliefs even at the expense of misunderstanding his opponent.

Finally there are a small handful of what seem to be honest mistakes; I will mention them quickly, though there may be others I have missed. In his discussion of the Marcionite denial of marriage, Tertullian argued that this has to do with the fact that Marcionites consider marriage to be a licentious violation of chastity; the reality is of course that it was seen as a means to confute the Creator and to try to put a halt to His loathsome scheme of generation. Tertullian claimed that Marcion derived from the Jews his idea that the messiah had from the Jews; a patently

ridiculous claim given Marcion's clear and obvious hatred of the Jewish God and His servants. The idea that the messiah had not yet come developed naturally, as Harnack shows, first from the separation of Law and Gospel and then by extension from the fact that two distinct Gods obviously cannot have the same messiah. Finally, I am quite certain that Pontic women do not use battle-axes<sup>320</sup> while doing their housework.

In conclusion, we find that Tertullian, despite his sharp intellect, made some mistakes. He omitted some important information, even when in at least one case he was certainly aware of it. He was sometimes unclear about the distinction between various Marcionite traditions. He was a little too concerned with finding specific philosophical root causes of heretical beliefs, though he was sometimes correct in this. He assumed some of his own theological ideas onto the Marcionites when they did not apply. Sometimes he was just wrong, and sometimes he was just angry. Despite all this I have found that he is right far more often than he is wrong, and indeed, far more often than one might expect, given his vitriolic critique.

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<sup>320</sup> AM, 1.1.



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