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# Marcion and the Jews

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About 150 C.E. Justin claimed that Marcion's teaching had spread throughout the whole human race (*Apol.* 20.5-6) and fifty years or so later Tertullian made much the same observation (*Marc.* 5.19). The number of tracts written to combat Marcionite influence (most no longer extant), the extraordinary length of Tertullian's *Adversus Marcionem*—the longest and one of the more tedious things he wrote—and the fact that Celsus knew of only two branches of Christianity, one of them Marcionite (Origen *Cels.* 2.6, 5.54, 6.57, 7.25-26), all reinforce the view that during its heyday in the second century the Marcionite church was one of the dominant forms of Christianity. In some places and at some times it was probably the main form of Christianity known to the inhabitants,<sup>1</sup> and even beyond the second century the influence of Marcion's views continued to be felt. Theodoret, a Syrian bishop in the mid-fifth century, announces with some pride his success in cleaning up pockets of Marcionite resistance in several local villages (*Ep.* 81, 113).

The attitude of the Marcionites towards Judaism is thus an important component in the relationship between Jews and Christians in the second century. Surprisingly, however, this aspect of Marcion's thought has received little attention. There may be a variety of reasons for this. Perhaps Marcion's anti-Judaism is considered to be so obvious and so extreme that it scarcely warrants analysis. There is some truth, too, in the observation that "the real problem for him is posed not by

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1 See W. Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy In Earliest Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), ch. 1, on Edessa, and the corrections by H. Koester, "GNOMAI DIAPHOROI: The Origin and Nature of Diversification in the History of Early Christianity," in H. Koester and J.M. Robinson, *Trajectories Through Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), 114-57.

the Jews but—as he saw it—by judaizing Christians.”<sup>2</sup> That is, Marcion was involved in an inner-church dispute, so that problems such as his connection with gnosticism, his eccentric Paulinism, and his innovative canon-making have naturally dominated scholarly discussion. It was moreover Marcion’s opponents who won the day and their attitude towards Jews and Judaism which most influenced the subsequent history of Christianity and, for this reason, D.P. Efroymson in his recent thoughtful essay<sup>3</sup> concentrates upon the anti-Jewish strain in the Catholic reaction to Marcion’s teachings. It is also common for Marcion to be lumped together with the gnostics and, despite well-known differences, to become part of the broader problem of the relationship between gnosticism and Judaism which, I am happy to say, it is not my duty to unravel at this point.

On a more general level it is perhaps fair to add that the study of any theme connected with Marcion is a daunting prospect. On the one hand, all the evidence which has survived is both secondary and hostile and this makes any discussion of Marcion an uncertain business. Moreover, the most important ancient witness to Marcion is Tertullian’s lengthy and rather pedantic tract which, while scoring some telling points and relieved occasionally by a welcome touch of sarcasm, requires of the reader a considerable degree of concentration simply to make it through from beginning to end. On the other hand, no discussion of Marcion can fail to be somewhat cowed by the classic work of modern times published by A. von Harnack in 1921.<sup>4</sup> The result of some fifty years of labour, into which he put more of himself than into any other of his voluminous works, it is a brilliant example of collation, synthesis, and sympathetic portrayal which leaves his successors with the feeling that there is little to do but pick over the bones. Harnack’s work is, of course, flawed. Inevitably, it reflects the predispositions of both the man and the liberal theology which he represents. Thus there is a natural affinity between Harnack’s view that the simple gospel of

2 K.H. Rengstorf and S. von Kortzfleisch, *Kirche und Synagoge: Handbuch zur Geschichte von Christen und Juden* (Stuttgart: E. Klett, 1968), 1:82 n. 139.

3 D.P. Efroymson, “The Patristic Connection,” in A.T. Davies (ed.), *Antisemitism and the Foundations of Christianity* (New York: Paulist, 1979), 98-117, especially 100-108.

4 A. von Harnack, *Marcion: Das Evangelium von Fremden Gott* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1921), TU 45. In *Neue Studien zu Marcion* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1923), Harnack reviewed some of his reviewers. Some of this material was later incorporated into a second edition (1924) which was not available to me. The two major studies since then are J. Knox, *Marcion and the New Testament* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1942), and E.C. Blackman, *Marcion and His Influence* (London: SPCK, 1948). See too the significant article by B. Aland, “Marcion: Versuch einer neuen Interpretation,” *ZTK* 70 (1973), 420-47. D.L. Balas, “Marcion Revisited: A ‘Post-Harnack’ Perspective,” in W.E. March (ed.), *Texts and Testaments: Critical Essays on the Bible and the Early Church Fathers* (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 1980), 95-108, arrived too late for full inclusion in the discussion. In general he both concurs with and adds to my observations on Harnack.

Jesus had been obscured by a complex overlay of christological dogmatism and Marcion's notion of a Jewish-Christian conspiracy which had successfully misrepresented the teaching of both Jesus and Paul. The radicalism and freshness of Marcion's teaching, and the heroic individuality which Harnack believed to be rooted in a profound religious experience also greatly appealed to him even though he recognized the distortion involved. He himself, ironically, was far from comfortable when the closest thing to a Marcionite revolution took place in his own day with the publication of Barth's commentary on Romans.<sup>5</sup> It is well known, too, that Harnack went to some lengths to defend his view that while Marcion's rejection of the Old Testament was rightly resisted in the second century, the beginning of the twentieth century was a propitious moment for its revival in modified form<sup>6</sup>—a judgment which was doubtless, in its turn, influenced by the inadequate view of Judaism and its law which prevailed in the scholarship of Harnack's day. Finally, we can note that Harnack almost certainly overplays the parallel between Marcion, Paul, and Luther, and underestimates the influence of gnostic thinkers on his hero.<sup>7</sup> This brief digression on Harnack is of some relevance to our theme, not only for the obvious reason that the image of Marcion in our day is to a large degree filtered through his work but also because, despite disagreements we might rightly have with both Harnack and Marcion, they both raise the issue of the relationship between Christianity and Judaism in a sharp and distinctive fashion. Whether their views have, in some respects, more to be said for them than the solutions adopted by their contemporaries is a matter worthy of some reflection at a later stage.

Before we can do this, however, a brief review of Marcion's life and teaching is required to set the scene.<sup>8</sup> Raised in Sinope, Pontus, and son of the local bishop, Marcion was apparently banished from the church by his father. The reason is not known. One rumour, probably circulated by his opponents, was that it was because he seduced a young girl; but most prefer to think it was a result of his already strange views. He travelled down through Asia Minor with letters of recommendation from Sinope (which suggests some division of opinion there) and either then, or perhaps later in his career, he met with Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna. When he enquired, "Do you know me?" Marcion received the immediate response, "I certainly do, you son of Satan."<sup>9</sup> If this represents the general reaction to Marcion in Asia Minor it provided reason

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5 See Aland, "Marcion," 421-22.

6 Harnack, *Marcion*, 247-54.

7 It scarcely need be added that the study of gnosticism has changed beyond all recognition since Harnack's day.

8 Harnack, *Marcion*, 1-27; Blackman, *Marcion*, 1-14.

9 Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.3.4.

enough for him to try his luck in Rome. Arriving apparently without fanfare, he subsequently attempted to curry favour with the offer of a substantial sum of money. Around 144 C.E. he attempted to persuade the Roman church to follow his teaching, but he was firmly rebuffed and his earlier gift returned. From then until his death (*c.* 160 C.E.) he busied himself with immense energy and success in establishing an alternative church. Some time during his stay in Rome, whether before or after the break is not known, Marcion met and was subsequently influenced by the gnostic teacher, Cerdo (*Iren. Haer.* 1:27.1-3; *Tert. Marc.* 1.2; 1.22; 3.21; 4.17).

Although it has come down to us only at the hands of his opponents, the outlines of Marcion's teaching are sufficiently clear for us to be able to provide a sketch and to draw attention to matters particularly relevant to our theme. It should be remembered, of course, that while some of Marcion's views are marked by what seems to be obstinate rationalism and rigorous logic, not all his positions appear to have been fully thought through. This, at least, is the impression conveyed by Tertullian, and probably has as much to do with the inchoate nature of Marcion's thought as it does with Tertullian's desire to ridicule and rebut him. That this was so is perhaps further indicated by the significant adjustments to Marcion's teaching which his most important pupil, Apelles, felt obliged to make.<sup>10</sup>

There were, in Marcion's view, two gods.<sup>11</sup> The one, creator of the world and all that is in it, is the god of the Old Testament—a fickle, temperamental deity who rules the created order through his law. Sometimes Marcion describes him as wretched and petty, capable of vindictive outbursts and favouritism, but he views him as essentially a righteous rather than an evil god even though he understands the concept of righteousness in an inflexibly legalistic fashion. While Marcion clearly considers this god to be inferior he is never in any doubt as to his reality. The special concern of the creator always has been and always will be his favoured people, the Jews. This portrait Marcion gained largely from an insistently literal reading of the Old Testament which eschewed all attempts to explain away difficulties by the use of allegorical exegesis. The other, the redeemer deity, is radically different: a god of mercy, love and compassion, utterly separate from the creator god and wholly unknown until revealed by Jesus. He is an alien god, alien, that is, to the creator's world and all that belongs to it, and his appearance in the person of Jesus is an unprecedented intrusion. He is the god of the Christians rather than of the Jews. This "stranger" god, the god of love, would bring salvation to unrighteous Israelites (during

10 Harnack, *Marcion*, 213-29; 323-39.

11 Harnack, *Marcion*, 135-59; Blackman, *Marcion*, 66-80; H. Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion* (Boston: Beacon, 1953), 137-46 Aland, "Marcion," 425-29, has useful corrections of Harnack.

the descent into hell) but not to righteous Israelites who, bound by their intimate relationship with the creator, would not be able to respond to him.

These two deities, entirely distinct in character and attributes, can be further characterized by the principles law and gospel, which not only belong to different documents but also describe two different modes of operation in the world. According to Tertullian this distinction lies at the root of Marcion's system: "The separation of law and gospel is the primary and principal exploit of Marcion" (*Marc.* 1.19; cf. 4.6; 5.13).

Man, as part of the created order, belongs wholly to this world and its god.<sup>12</sup> In distinction from most gnostic systems, man has no divine spark, no affinity with the saviour god. Salvation originates outside of both man and the world. It is probable that some gnostics spun their fabulous myths for sheer pleasure, but the serious purpose of these stories of devolution, these "epics of decline" (Jonas), was to preserve at however distant a remove a connection between at least some men and the deity who was the ultimate source of redemption. For Marcion there was no such connection. Hope for salvation rested solely upon the intrusion of an alien and hitherto unknown god.

Jesus' irruption onto this scene was unprecedented and unheralded.<sup>13</sup> As the son and revealer of the saviour god he could have no close association with the creator god and his world. He was thus in his earthly existence not a real but a phantom man, appearing only in "the likeness of human flesh." His message about the god of love who cares for the poor and the oppressed (just the way, incidently, in which Harnack portrays the teaching of Jesus in *The Essence of Christianity*) implicitly undermines the Old Testament god though without explicitly attacking him. By his death, caused both by the Jews and the principalities and powers, Jesus provides a ransom (understood, as one would expect, in quite literal fashion) which provides release for the redeemed from the clutches of the creator god and his world—a more realistic understanding of Jesus' death than is usual among Christian gnostics, for whom it was a particularly troublesome issue.<sup>14</sup> Consistent with this, and again different from many gnostics, was the Marcionites' willingness to undergo martyrdom, a fact which probably won them some of their admirers. Precisely how it was that men enslaved totally to the creator god could respond to the message of an alien deity Marcion scarcely makes clear, apart from a few vague references to the impression created by Jesus' words and deeds. That the revelation of the redeemer god through his son Jesus was wholly unpredicted had the

12 Aland, "Marcion," 433-37, is especially good on this.

13 Harnack, *Marcion*, 160-80; Blackman, *Marcion*, 98-102; Aland, "Marcion," 437-40.

14 As Aland ("Marcion," 438) points out, Marcion's docetism and his view of the death of Jesus were perfectly suited to his view of the body in the economy of salvation.

interesting consequence that, according to Marcion, Jesus could not be the Jewish Messiah. He still believed that the Jewish Messiah would come, but that he would be a Messiah for the Jews alone and his kingdom earthly and temporary, unlike the universal and eternal salvation brought by the non-messianic Jesus.

Marcion imposed a rigorous asceticism on his followers. Since the body belonged to the created order and did not share in the process of redemption, everything connected with it had to be disciplined and controlled. It is a commonplace of Christian polemics, from the New Testament on, that false belief leads directly to immoral behaviour. No such charge was made against Marcion or his followers and doubtless their high moral purpose, as well as their willingness to suffer martyrdom, in part accounts for their appeal. On the other hand, by banning sexual intercourse, even within marriage, they contributed to their own decline by failing to breed new members.

Crucial to Marcion's beliefs was his understanding of Paul. He believed that his own teaching was neither more nor less than a revival of the true Pauline gospel. Paul's letters are the source of much of his terminology, the distinctive twist of many of his "gnostic" ideas, and his conviction that judaizing Christians had conspired to pervert the message of Jesus and Paul. Assuming that Paul's references to "my gospel" meant that he had used one written gospel, Marcion decided that it was the gospel of Luke. Since he had abandoned the Old Testament, which was then the universal Christian scripture, he needed a replacement; the combination of Paul's letters and Luke's gospel, drastically but not always consistently purged of all pro-Jewish material, took over that role. Together with the no-longer-extant *Antitheses* written by Marcion they became the core of the Marcionite tradition, ultimately provoking their opponents into providing an expanded canon of their own.<sup>15</sup>

This rather too orderly sketch of Marcion's thought should not be taken to presume a solution to the persistent dispute about the roots of Marcion's thought. Was he essentially a gnostic or a Paulinist? How much did his literal turn of mind and ascetic inclinations contribute to the overall scheme? Was his view of Judaism *sui generis* or can it be wholly explained by his gnosticism or Paulinism? It is appropriate to leave the last of these questions for our concluding paragraphs, but whatever solution we adopt it is important not to underestimate the influence of his "gnosticism," his "exaggerated Paulinism," or some combination of the two on his view of Judaism and the Jews. If Marcion was by temperament an ascetic or responding to an ascetic trend of his time, it could explain his revulsion at the world and the flesh and could have contributed to his reading of certain Old Testament and Pauline

15 By far the best account of Marcion's view of scripture is in H. von Campenhausen, *The Formation of the Christian Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), 73-102, 149-67.

texts, but on the evidence available it is scarcely an all-inclusive explanation. The same holds true of his literal-mindedness, evident in his reading of the Old Testament and of those New Testament writings he chose to use. It is an important factor and may in part be a reaction to the kind of allegorical exegesis found in Justin or, in more extreme form, in the epistle of Barnabas, but on its own it can not explain everything.

We are left with two main, and probably false, options, and it is in terms of these that the debate is usually cast. Harnack, convinced that Marcion's views sprang from an intense religious experience, denies almost all contemporary influences (especially gnosticism) and sees him as representative only of an exaggerated form of Paulinism.<sup>16</sup> The reverse has commonly been argued,<sup>17</sup> not only because of the striking parallels with gnosticism but also because it is held that Marcion's eccentric reading of Paul is inexplicable unless he was predisposed to view things in a dualistic fashion. In extreme form neither view is convincing. The notion of an inferior creator god, the deeply pessimistic view of the world and the flesh, and the deliberate reversal of Old Testament convictions are so close to gnostic ideas that it is difficult to think that there has not been some cross-fertilization. On the other hand Marcion is "a gnostic but not as one of the gnostics." The absolute separation of the two deities from each other and one of them from the world, the contrast between the god of justice/law and the god of compassion/grace, the insistence that man is defined wholly by his location in his world, and the notion of Jesus' death as a ransom (to take the more obvious examples) are not typically gnostic and are almost certainly taken from his reading of Paul. Of course the contrast "gnostic or Pauline" is itself questionable in view of the intense interest in Paul among gnostic groups, notably the Valentinians. And since it is at any rate misleading to think of gnosticism in monolithic terms, it may be simplest to think of Marcion's teaching as one version of gnosticism among others. When we compare Marcion with other gnostics who used Paul it is apparent not only that his reading of Paul is eccentric, even for a gnostic, but also that his Paulinism is proportionately more influential than in other gnostic thinkers.

In fact, to read Marcion's thought in the light of the scanty evidence for his career makes a great deal of sense. Ascetically inclined and with a literal cast of mind, he could well have formed the basis of his views by a concentrated reading of some of Paul's letters. If Christianity in Sinope was essentially Pauline, but of a kind in which the sharp edge and verve of the original Paul had been lost (cf. the Pastoral Epistles,

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16 Harnack, *Marcion*, 135-36.

17 See the list in A. Lindemann, *Paulus im ältesten Christentum* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1979), 387, and the comments of Harnack on several of his reviewers in *Neue Studien*, 1f.

Ephesians, etc.), a reading of some of Paul's letters might well have set him thinking—especially if the letter most familiar to him was Galatians. That the language of Galatians is so influential in his thought, that it stands at the head of his list of the Pauline epistles, and that of all Paul's letters it was addressed to communities closest to Sinope are all things which suggest that this was so. And if the view of Paul which Marcion gets from Galatians is exaggerated, distorted, or truncated, then so is any view of Paul which knows him only through this epistle—as is shown by the difficulty some of us have in bringing the views expressed in Galatians into line, for example, with those expressed in Romans. Marcion edited Galatians as he did all of Paul's epistles but, according to Tertullian (*Marc.* 5.13), his editing of Romans was the most drastic of all, which is what we might expect from someone brought up on Galatians whether he distorted its meaning or not. It may well be, too, that in Asia Minor Marcion had already come across groups who interpreted Paul in a "gnostic" fashion (cf. opponents of the author of the Pastorals, 2 Pet. 2:15-16, etc.). The likelihood, therefore, is that Marcion began as a Paulinist, but with a brand of Paulinism already open to gnostic influence and profoundly affected by his own eccentric reading of Paul. His sessions with Cerdo in Rome presumably exposed him to ideas which were both congenial and suggestive and which could, with some adaptation, be used to articulate and extend the views he had already formed.

We are now in a position to draw together some of the threads which relate specifically to our theme and reflect upon their consequences. We have noted in passing a number of specific comments on Judaism in the reports of Marcion's teaching and it is now time to dwell on them a little further. First, however, it is important to state the obvious: Marcion's teaching in general contains a profound denigration of Judaism and the symbols precious to its life and faith. Whether it is in his view of their god, their scriptures, their law, or in his account of Jesus, Paul, or the Jewish-Christian conspiracy, in each case Judaism appears as an inferior religion. In Marcion's system of dualistic oppositions the things which characterize Judaism always form the darker side of the contrast. Their god is real and essentially righteous, but also severe, capricious, and prone to anger (*Marc.* 2.16, 20, 23; Origen *Hom.* vii.i). His plans for the world are supposedly set out in the law—that is, the Old Testament as a whole—yet many of its regulations are complex and pointless (*Marc.* 2.18-19) and he even arbitrarily encourages men to disregard it (*Marc.* 2.21-22), as Jesus did too (*Marc.* 4.12, 16, 27). We also noted Marcion's conviction that while the salvation offered by Jesus could be received by unrighteous Israelites who were cut off from the creator god, righteous Israelites would be immune to his appeal (*Iren. Haer.* 1.27.3; *Epiph. Pan.* 42.4). This looks like a mild form of the deliberately provocative reversal of Jewish beliefs found in some gnos-

tic groups (Ophites, Cainites, etc.), but in Marcion's system it may have a different basis, since it is the logical outcome of his belief that the Jewish god is a real deity with a special attachment to his chosen people.

There is, however, little to suggest that Marcion was deliberately anti-Jewish, for a great deal of what he said seems to be the result of his antithetical turn of mind and his own peculiar form of Christian self-definition. He did not, for example, berate the Jews for the death of Jesus. That event was ultimately the responsibility of the creator and the principalities and powers working under him (*Marc.* 3.24; 5.6) and the Jewish rejection of Jesus was natural since he was an alien and unprecedented figure who did not fit their expectations of a Messiah (*Marc.* 3.6).

This leads to a further interesting observation. In a number of places Tertullian reports that Marcion allied himself with the Jews against received Christian opinion by denying that Jesus was the Messiah of Jewish expectation:

So then, since heretical madness was claiming that the Christ had come who had never been previously mentioned, it followed that it had to contend that the Christ was not yet come who had from all time been foretold: and so it was compelled to form an alliance with Jewish error, and build up an argument for itself, on the pretext that the Jews, assured that he who has come was an alien, not only rejected him as a stranger but even put him to death as an opponent, although they would beyond doubt have recognized him and have treated him with all religious devotion if he had been their own. (*Marc.* 3.6)

It is now possible for the heretic to learn, and the Jew as well, what he ought to know already, the reason for the Jews' errors: for from the Jew the heretic has accepted guidance in this discussion, the blind borrowing from the blind, and has fallen into the same ditch. (*Marc.* 3.7)

Let the heretic now give up borrowing poison from the Jew—the asp, as they say, from the viper. (*Marc.* 3.8)<sup>18</sup>

It is not clear why Marcion reached this conclusion. It could have been the logical outcome of an *a priori* conviction about the unprecedented nature of Jesus' message and the god he represented, as is suggested by Tertullian in 3.6, or it may be that exposure to Jewish arguments about Jesus' messiahship, or even simply a comparison of the discrepancies between the promises and their supposed fulfilment, led Marcion to conclude that Jesus was an unlikely candidate for messianic office. It suited Tertullian's purpose admirably to associate Marcion and the Jews (against whom he also wrote a tract) to their mutual disadvantage, but there is no reason to doubt his report. Marcion apparently believed, with the Jews, that the creator did not prophesy the Messiah's death

18 The translation here and elsewhere is that of E. Evans, *Tertullian Adversus Marcionem* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972).

and would not at any rate have subjected him to that cursed form, crucifixion (*Marc.* 3.18; 5.3); and he agreed that many of the prophecies used by other Christians as christological proof-texts (*Isa.* 7:14, for example) were inapplicable or had already been fulfilled in past events (*Marc.* 3.13). For Marcion there were two Messiahs and two kingdoms (*Marc.* 4.16). The Jewish Messiah had yet to come and when he did he would bring an earthly kingdom which would incorporate Jews and proselytes: “[Y]our 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” (*Marc.* 3.24).

There is thus a curious tension in Marcion’s view of Judaism. On the one hand it is often implicitly denigrated and always, by definition, seen to be inferior. On the other hand, Marcion apparently allied himself in many crucial respects with the Jewish view of Christian claims (cf. Trypho in Justin’s *Dialogue*) and held out for them a future described in their own terms—even though for Marcion it could not compete with the eternal kingdom brought by Jesus. To concede to the Jews their messianic hope and the reinheritance of their land was to reverse the current (and subsequent) Christian view that the loss of their land, following the disastrous rebellions against Rome, was a divine punishment for their obdurate rejection of Jesus as Messiah and their complicity in his death.

What led Marcion to his position? To ask the question is to raise in a particular way the more general problem of the roots of Marcion’s thought which we discussed above. But the factors considered there—literal-mindedness, asceticism, Paulinism, gnosticism—important and influential as they are, provide no complete explanation of his view of Judaism. Are there, then, additional factors to be considered?

Blackman, basing himself on one of Tertullian’s opening salvoes—that Marcion, like many heretics, was unduly obsessed by the problem of evil—thinks that much of Marcion’s thought, including his view of the Old Testament and its god, sprang from a profound disquiet over the problem of theodicy.<sup>19</sup> While he prefers Tertullian’s monotheistic solution, he thinks that Marcion may well have had a more profound perception of the problem. If this were so, however, it is not clear why Marcion retained the god of the Old Testament at all, even after his demotion, nor why he characterized him as righteous rather than evil. Nor does it shed any immediate light on Marcion’s ambivalent attitude towards Judaism.

Goppelt suggests that Marcion was intent on rejecting the god of the Old Testament rather than the Jews, and thus does not insult the Jews as a people. As a hellenist he takes a cool, somewhat distant view of

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<sup>19</sup> Blackman, *Marcion*, 71-73.

Judaism while at the same time being influenced by certain kinds of Jewish exegetical tradition.<sup>20</sup> This is more a statement of the problem than an explanation of it and it probably underestimates the degree to which contemporary Jewish-Christian relations affected Marcion's thought. Rengstorf takes a slightly different tack when he argues that Marcion's rejection of the Old Testament and Judaism has nothing to do with anti-Semitism because the Jews with whom he disputes are not the Jews of his time but those of the Old Testament and New Testament, insofar as they are people of the Demiurge and belong to him. Quite apart from the logic of this statement, which is not altogether clear and overlooks the obvious denigration of Judaism in Marcion's teaching, there is no evidence that Marcion made such a clear distinction between ancient and contemporary Judaism. Rengstorf goes on to suggest another two, admittedly speculative, reasons why Marcion was fairly favourably disposed towards the Jews.<sup>21</sup> On the one hand, by rejecting Jesus who was not their Messiah, the Jews unwittingly opened up the way for the universal salvation brought by Jesus—against the will of the Demiurge and despite themselves. On the other hand, Marcion's dispute was not with the Jews as such but rather with (as he saw them) judaizing Catholic Christians. These observations are pertinent but they do not explain why Marcion allied himself with the Jews on some matters, unless we are to suppose that it was a mere tactical move to procure any available ammunition for the defence of his position.

Harnack takes a somewhat different tack. His tentative explanation is that Marcion came from a family of proselytes and, like his hero Paul, experienced a dramatic conversion to Christianity which led him to turn on his former religion in anger and disillusionment but without kicking over the traces altogether.<sup>22</sup> Thus Marcion's messianic beliefs are merely a hang over from his Jewish past. We need not accept the questionable view of both Paul and Judaism which this implies, to concede that it has a certain degree of plausibility, although it is entirely speculative. That Marcion's rejection of Judaism is more radical than his predecessors is explained, according to Harnack, by his exaggerated Paulinism and, in the light of our knowledge of the way in which Paul's relationship to Judaism has frequently been distorted, we cannot doubt that this could happen. It might have been equally important that, by the time Marcion wrote, church and synagogue were sufficiently distinct that, for a Jew, conversion to Christianity would almost inevitably have led to a more radical break with Judaism than at the time of Paul.

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20 L. Goppelt, *Christentum und Judentum im ersten und zweiten Jahrhundert* (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1954).

21 Rengstorf, *Kirche*, 65-66, 81 n. 139.

22 Harnack, *Neue Studien*, 15-16.

Indeed, recognition of the complex relationship between church and synagogue in the second century may provide further clues to Marcion's thought. For Marcion, of course, the relationship was not complex. He pressed for a radical simplification of the issue: Church and synagogue, Judaism and Christianity are to be seen as entirely separate entities. Why? Grant suggests that he was driven primarily by the need to reassess the relationship of Christianity to Judaism following the disastrous Jewish revolt under Bar Cochba. After these events any association with Judaism, especially the apocalyptic Judaism that inspired so many of the rebels, would have been a political, social and theological liability.<sup>23</sup> This is not implausible, although there is no clear evidence to indicate that the actions of the rebels in Judea and its environs affected the political and social standing of diaspora Jewish communities in Asia Minor, Rome or elsewhere.

There are other aspects of church-synagogue relationships which may be pertinent too. If Jews and Christians in Sinope and elsewhere in Asia Minor came into contact with each other, friendly or hostile, this could have provided material to set Marcion thinking. We know, for example,<sup>24</sup> of Aquila, an older contemporary of Marcion's from Pontus and a Jewish proselyte, who produced a new Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures, one purpose of which seems to have been to counter Christian use of the LXX, especially with respect to christological proof-texts. Marcion was convinced that Christianity was both true and superior to all other religious options, including Judaism. The Christianity he knew had appropriated the Jewish god and the Jewish scriptures and doubtless thought of itself as the New Israel. Yet these claims were strongly contested by the Jews who, more anomalously still, continued to thrive. Christian exegetes had to go through considerable contortions to defend their conclusions, not least their claim that Jesus was the Messiah. Among many Christians this probably caused little concern. Justin, for example, in his *Dialogue With Trypho*, rides the waves of Jewish-Christian debate with supreme confidence though fully aware of Jewish counter-claims. But did all Christians react in this way? Could Marcion, for example, have found himself torn between his Christian convictions and the problem posed by the continuation of Judaism and by its alternative exegesis of the scriptures which, in the areas of dispute, may have seemed to his literal mind the more plausible? Could it be that Marcion concluded that the claim that Jesus was the Messiah and the Christian church the True Israel fitted neither the facts nor the predictions, and that the confusion of Christianity with Judaism only served to undermine the distinctiveness of the former?

23 R.M. Grant, *Gnosticism and Early Christianity*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 121-28; followed by Balas, "Marcion," 98-99.

24 Noted by Harnack, *Marcion*, 22.

One more factor has also to be borne in mind. There is a considerable amount of evidence to show that the churches in Asia Minor in Marcion's day had to contend with the problem of Gentile judaizers, that is, Gentile Christians who found themselves attracted to some of the beliefs and practices of Judaism. Ignatius and the author of Revelation, for example, seem aware of and alarmed by the problem.<sup>25</sup> The very existence of such groups would have blurred the distinction between Judaism and Christianity. They would also have compounded the problems caused by Jewish-Christian debates by raising the threat of erosion of the church's identity through a process of "judaization" and, even worse, defection from church to synagogue. One way of responding, found in Ignatius, was to sound the alarm, to threaten and cajole; another might have been to insist upon a radical separation of Judaism and Christianity which left no room for further confusion.

We cannot be sure that these two issues—Jewish-Christian debates and Gentile Christian judaizing—affected Marcion, but they do provide a plausible setting for his extreme solution to the problem of Jewish-Christian relations: leave Judaism for the Jews and let Christianity be seen as a new and superior venture. Conceding to Judaism their God, their Scriptures, their Messiah, and their Kingdom solved in one bold move the dilemmas posed by the survival of Judaism, rival claims to a common scripture and the attraction of Judaism to some Gentile Christians.

There seem to have been three solutions to the Jewish-Christian question in the early Christian period. One was the Jewish-Christian option which was rapidly running out of steam by Marcion's time. Another, arguably the least satisfactory, was the Catholic desire to have the best of both worlds. A third was the radical separation proposed by Marcion, part of the attraction of which perhaps was that it solved with one bold stroke what must have been an extraordinarily puzzling situation for many Gentile Christians in the second century who had rubbed shoulders with the Jews. Far from being surprised at Marcion, we should perhaps be surprised that his enthusiastic and fairly numerous supporters alone came to the same conclusion.

This leads finally to a brief comparison between Marcion's view of Judaism and that propounded by his Catholic Christian opponents. As Efroymson rightly points out, the Catholic response to Marcion drew upon the *adversus Judaeos* tradition in order to defend its view of the creator god and his dealings with humanity. In place of Marcion's notion of an inferior god they put the notion of an inferior and disobedient people. The character of the god was salvaged, but at the expense of the original people of God. In reply to Marcion's view that

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25 Ign. *Phld.* 6:2; Rev. 2:9, 3:9. See L. Gaston's article in this volume. Perhaps Marcion should be added to his list of examples.

the arrival of Jesus was wholly without precedent, Tertullian resorts to a heightened emphasis on the clarity of the Old Testament predictions both of Christ and of his rejection by the Jews. And insofar as it is conceded that Jesus and Paul propound a legitimate sense of the newness of the gospel in their conflict with the Jews, this is seen to be consistent both with the endless tussle between God and his disobedient people and with his intention all along to replace the old covenant with the new. Views that are thus familiar enough in the context of the Christian conflict with Judaism are now used in another setting to resolve an internal Christian dispute. The effect is that "Marcion's challenge and threat placed all the anti-Judaic themes in a new apologetic context, appending them to ideas of God and Christ in ways which came perilously close to permanence."<sup>26</sup>

It is clear that both the Marcionite and the Catholic positions involve a denigration of Judaism. Putting it simply, it is as if the Marcionite said to the Jew: "Keep your God, your Scriptures, your Messiah, and your law; we consider them to be inferior, superseded in every way by the gospel." The Catholic said: "We'll take your God, your Messiah, your Scriptures, and some of your law; as for you, you are disinherited, cast into a limbo, and your survival serves only as a warning of the consequences of obdurate wickedness." I would not like to be found defending either view of Judaism. However it might be argued that the one which more obviously belittles Jewish symbols was, ironically, in practice the lesser of two evils. The Marcionite position left Judaism intact, decidedly inferior though it was considered to be. There was a point, as Marcion seems to have noted, in Jews continuing to be Jews, keeping their law, and awaiting their Messiah. And it is of some interest, though perhaps no more than a coincidence, that there is no record of the persecution of Jews by the Marcionite churches. The Catholic position, imperiously defending its proprietorial rights to the Jewish God and scriptures, could find only a negative reason for the continued existence of the Jews. The one involved a radical break which left Judaism for the Jews; the other took what it wanted and, in effect, left nothing for the Jews. Or, to exaggerate a little, the one attacked the symbols but left the people alone; the other took the symbols and attacked the people. Judaism is the loser in either case. Whether the Marcionite position, had it prevailed, would have led to the same sad consequences as the view of its opponents is hard to say. But it is worth a moment's reflection.

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26 Efroymson, "Patristic," 100-108, quotation on 105.