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IRENÆUS'S DEFENSE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT AS
PART OF THE CANON OF SCRIPTURE

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Theology

by
John Allen Whitman
December 2022

APPROVAL SHEET

IRENÆUS'S DEFENSE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT AS
PART OF THE CANON OF SCRIPTURE

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For the glory of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	vii
LIST OF FIGURES	viii
PREFACE.....	ix
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
Thesis and Methodology.....	3
2. MARCION’S HISTORICAL CONTEXT	4
I: Life and Career.....	4
Marcion’s Predecessor: Cerdon.....	6
Marcion’s Antithesis: Justin Martyr.....	8
Marcion’s Differentiation from Gnosticism.....	9
Marcion’s Canon of Scripture	10
Marcion’s Confrontation with Roman Christianity.....	16
Marcion’s Legacy.....	18
II: Marcionite Christianity	20
Rejection of the Old Testament.....	21
Rejection of Israel’s God.....	22
Proclamation of an Unknown God.....	23
Denial of the Humanity of Jesus	24
Proclamation of an Ascetic Message.....	25
Advancement of Marcionite Theology.....	26
Threatens the Church at Large	27

Chapter	Page
Summary	28
3. IRENAEUS'S HISTORICAL IMPORTANCE	30
I: Biographical Context.....	31
Apostolic Predecessors.....	32
Relationship to Polycarp	35
Influenced by Ignatius's Example.....	38
Rise to the Bishopric	44
II: Literary Contributions.....	46
<i>The Demonstration of Apostolic Preaching</i>	46
<i>Against Heresies</i>	48
III: Hermeneutical Legacy	49
Theology.....	50
Philosophy	51
Continuity	52
Christology	53
Interpretive Tools	57
Summary	57
4. IRENAEUS'S ARGUMENTS ON BEHALF OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.....	59
I: The Basis of the Irenaeus's Argument.....	60
II: The Theological Argument	62
Apostolic Succession.....	65
Presbyterial Proof Texts	66
III: Delegitimizing Marcionite Hermeneutics	68
Summary	72

Chapter	Page
5. IRENAEUS’S RELEVANCE TODAY	74
The Continuing Relevance of These Ancient Arguments	74
Summary	77
BIBLIOGRAPHY	78

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>1 Apol.</i>	<i>First Apology</i>
<i>ANF</i>	<i>Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writings of the Fathers down to AD 325.</i> 10 vols. Edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1885
Barnard	Justin Martyr. <i>The First and Second Apologies.</i> Translated by Leslie William Barnard. Ancient Christian Writers 56. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1997
Behr	Irenaeus of Lyons. <i>The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching.</i> Translated by John Behr. Popular Patristics 17. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997
Crusé	Eusebius of Pamphilus. <i>Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History.</i> Translated by Christian Frederic Crusé. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009
<i>Eph.</i>	<i>To the Ephesians</i>
<i>Epid.</i>	<i>The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching</i>
<i>Haer.</i>	<i>Against Heresies</i>
<i>Hist. eccl.</i>	<i>Ecclesiastical History</i>
LXX	Septuagint
<i>Magn.</i>	<i>To the Magnesians</i>
<i>Phil.</i>	<i>The Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians</i>
<i>Phld.</i>	<i>To the Philadelphians</i>
<i>Pol.</i>	<i>To Polycarp</i>
<i>Rom.</i>	<i>To the Romans</i>
<i>Smyrn.</i>	<i>To the Smyrnaens</i>
Stewart	Ignatius of Antioch. <i>The Letters.</i> Translated by Alistair Stewart. Popular Patristics 49. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2013
<i>Trall.</i>	<i>To the Trallians</i>

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Location of Sinope	4
2. Provinces of the Roman Empire	33
3. John's apostolic footprint.....	34
4. Ignatius's area of influence	40

PREFACE

I want to thank The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for the opportunity to complete the modular Master of Theology program in Church History and thereby become better equipped to serve as an interpreter and expositor of Holy Scripture. Special thanks go to both my academic advisor, Michael A. G. Haykin, and my thesis fellow, Caleb Neel, for their expert assistance. I have valued their answers to my questions, their advice, and their recommendations. I also want to thank my professors, Drs. Gregg Allison, Jonathan Pennington, Mitchell Chase, and Stephen Presley, for their excellent teaching, which has further fueled my desire to know more about our Triune God. Additional thanks go to Rabbi Feivel Strauss and Rabbi Jeremy Simmons for their assistance in recommending relevant resources, encouragement in my studies, and their friendship, which I have treasured throughout my research and writing. Finally, I want to thank my pastor, Michal Priest, for his encouragement in my pursuit of God's calling on my life, his recommendation of research materials, and his friendship.

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Bartlett, Tennessee

December 2022

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the second century has garnered renewed interest as a decisive period for Christian doctrinal formation.¹ The early church had not yet settled its relationship to the Old Testament canon or the Jewish heritage of Jesus and his apostles; consequently, debate arose as to what texts the church should consider authoritative Scripture. Two principal voices clashed on this question: Marcion of Sinope and Irenaeus of Lyons. Marcion propagated the belief that the church was entirely disconnected from the Old Testament, declaring that these texts did not belong to the God of Jesus but to Israel's God, Yahweh. Irenaeus argued against this teaching, declaring that continuity existed between both Old and New Testaments and that the God of Israel was also the Father of Jesus Christ.

Modern reconstructions depict a period of fluid theological boundaries and experimentation. The historian Eusebius believed this was the result of the devil marshaling his pseudo-Christian deceivers to undermine the church from within. The Marcionites were one of these weaponized groups.² This century's doctrine existed on a

¹ Judith M. Lieu, *Marcion and the Making of a Heretic: God and Scripture in the Second Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 1.

² Lieu, *Marcion*, 26. Lieu cites Eusebius's description of the rise of the pseudo-Christian deceivers:

(1) As the Churches now were reflecting the light like splendid luminaries throughout the world, and the faith of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ was spreading so as to embrace the whole human race, the malignant spirit of iniquity, as the enemy of all truth and always the most violent enemy to the salvation of men, was now devising every species of machination against the church as he had already before armed himself against it by the former persecutions. (2) When, however, cut off from those, he then waged a war by other means in which he employed the agency of wicked impostors as certain abandoned instruments and minions of destruction. Intent upon every course, he instigated these insidious impostors and deceivers by assuming the same name with us (Christians) to lead those believers whom they happened to seduce to the depths of destruction and by their presumption also to turn those who were ignorant of the faith from the path that led to the saving truth of God. (3)

spectrum bracketed by two heretical groups: the Ebionites on one end and the Marcionites as their antipodal equivalent.³ The latter group traces itself to one of the best-known figures of the second century, Marcion of Sinope. Marcion was declared a heretic by what became Catholic Christianity, yet his influence challenged the church to define its doctrine.⁴

Historian Judith Lieu and Jewish studies scholar Yaniv Feller demonstrate that Adolf von Harnack's 1923 book, *Marcion: The Gospel of the Alien God*, has influenced modernity's view of Marcion. Harnack depicted Marcion and his teachings as in need of rehabilitation after two millennia of being maligned by the church for his idea that Christianity should be established on the foundation of a fixed collection of writings possessing canonical authority.⁵ However, Lieu believes it wiser to view Marcion as a figure who conceived of a Christianity, rooted within Scripture and received tradition, that was vital to present to a new audience whose worldview was primarily based upon Platonic philosophy.⁶ Therefore, Marcion represents the limits of tolerance amongst

Hence a certain double-headed and double-tongued serpentine power proceeding from that Menander we have already mentioned as the successor of Simon, produced two leaders of different heresies: Saturninus, a native of Antioch, and Basilides of Alexandria. The former of these established schools of impious heresy in Syria, the latter in Egypt. Eusebius Pamphilus, *Hist. eccl.* 4.7.1–3 (Crusé, 122–23).

³ The Ebionites were a hyper-Judaistic sect that kept the entire law. They believed Jesus was not virgin born but the son of Mary and Joseph and an exceptional but ordinary man. They only believed in the God of the Old Testament and entirely rejected Paul's teachings and writings, viewing Paul as an apostate. The Ebionites only accepted the Gospel of Matthew from chapter 3 onward and utilized no other New Testament books. The Ebionites were totally Judaized, while the Marcionites were totally docetic. Irenaeus addresses both the Marcionites and the Ebionites in Irenaeus of Lyons, *Haer.* 1.26.2 (*ANF*, 1:352) and 3.15.1 (*ANF*, 1:439).

⁴ Michael J. Kruger, *Christianity at the Crossroads: How the Second Century Shaped the Future of the Church* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018), 117.

⁵ Lieu, *Marcion*, 2. Lieu notes, "For Harnack, Marcion had a more immediate historical impact. He was to be credited as the first to conceive 'the idea of placing Christendom on the firm foundation of a definite theory of what is Christian' and of 'establishing this theory by a fixed collection of Christian writings with canonical authority.'" Feller contributes, "Harnack saw in Marcion a figure that for almost two millennia had been mistreated by the Church, and his monograph can be seen as an erudite attempt at rehabilitating Marcion." Yaniv Feller, "From Aher to Marcion: Martin Buber's Understanding of Gnosis," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 20, no. 4 (2013): 390.

⁶ Lieu, *Marcion*, 439.

second-century Christian groups and the importance of sacred writings in their understanding of truth.⁷

Thesis and Methodology

This thesis argues that Irenaeus stood as the key figure whose writings refuted Marcion's teaching and established the necessity of preserving the Old Testament as Scripture and part of the canon. First, this thesis will examine the life and teachings of Marcion to understand how he propagated his position that the Jewish texts were not to be considered Christian Scripture. Second, this thesis will examine Irenaeus's life and writings that explain his opposition to Marcionite Christianity. Third, this thesis will consider how Irenaeus's argument cemented the Old Testament's position as a vital component of the canon of Scripture.

⁷ David Brakke, *The Gnostics: Myth, Ritual, and Diversity in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 96.

CHAPTER 2
MARCION'S HISTORICAL CONTEXT



Figure 1. Location of Sinope¹

I: Life and Career

According to tradition, Marcion was a native of Sinope, the most important Greek city on the Black Sea's southern shore. His birth year remains unknown but is estimated at the end of the first century.² Harnack proposes a timeframe circa AD 85.³ His estimated date of death was AD 160. Jewish communities already existed within the

¹ David Anderson, "Sinope," Marcionite Research Library, last modified November 14, 1997, <https://www.marcionite-scripture.info/Sinope.html>.

² Kurt Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism*, trans. and ed. Robert McLachlan Wilson (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995), 313–14.

³ Adolf von Harnack, *Marcion: The Gospel of the Alien God*, trans. John E. Steeley and Lyle D. Bierma (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007), 15.

Roman province of Pontus from the earliest days of the Roman Empire. The first epistle of Peter presupposed Christians living there. Paul's co-laborer, Aquila, came from Pontus (Acts 18), as did a second Aquila, a Jewish proselyte Bible translator who was a contemporary of Marcion.⁴ Adolf von Harnack proposes that Marcion could have once been closely related to Judaism and further hypothesizes that Marcion and his family might have come out from Judaism since proselyte Jewish status was common within early Christianity.⁵ Harnack favors this hypothesis because Marcion and Aquila were similarly dogmatic. Marcion never sought to take away from the letter of the Old Testament. He knew the Jewish expositions of the Old Testament, he explained messianic prophecies in the same way the Jews did, his attitudes towards the Old Testament and Judaism are best understood as one of rejection, and yet no trace of Hellenism existed within Marcionite Christianity.⁶

Marcion's father was a shipowner and the bishop of Sinope's local Christian community. Consequently, Marcion grew up in a wealthy family and was immersed in Christianity from an early age.⁷ No reports exist to clarify if this was a Paulinist community in line with the distinctive views he later propagated or another form of Christianity.⁸ Harnack believes that Hippolytus's reference to and affirmation of Marcion's excommunication by his own father for "seducing a virgin" was simultaneously factual and polemical; Hippolytus speculated the true reason for Marcion's excommunication was his false teaching that seduced the church (i.e., the

⁴ Harnack, *Marcion*, 15.

⁵ Harnack, *Marcion*, 15.

⁶ Harnack, *Marcion*, 15.

⁷ Justo L. González, *The Story of Christianity*, vol. 1, *The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1984), 61.

⁸ Rudolph, *Gnosis*, 313–14.

virgin).⁹ Harnack also observes that Marcion's theological development is more understandable if he was a Christian from his early years and a member of the second-century church-at-large, since all of his life was spent working for the entirety of the Church with no intention of being a sectarian, which stood in contrast to contemporary gnostic groups.¹⁰

Scholars agree that Marcion was a wealthy merchant and shipowner from an affluent family; he inherited his profession from his father and became well-known even in Rome.¹¹ Sources also indicate Marcion had letters of recommendation from brothers in Pontus, indicating he still had followers in his home country despite being excommunicated by his father. Before traveling to Rome, Marcion was active in Asia Minor's western cities, seeking recognition from church leaders for his interpretations of Scripture, but he was rejected there as well. Moreover, Marcion's activities are believed to have included the old gnostic centres in Ephesus and Smyrna, where dissensions within orthodoxy may have still existed.¹²

Marcion's Predecessor: Cerdon

Marcion likely traveled in his own ship from Sinope to Rome around either AD 139¹³ to AD 140¹⁴ or AD 144¹⁵ (during the reign of Antonius Pius) and sent a female

⁹ Harnack, *Marcion*, 16.

¹⁰ Harnack, *Marcion*, 16.

¹¹ Michael J. Kruger, *Christianity at the Crossroads: How the Second Century Shaped the Future of the Church* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018), 116; David Brakke, *The Gnostics: Myth, Ritual, and Diversity in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 96; Rudolph, *Gnosis*, 313–14.

¹² Rudolph, *Gnosis*, 313–14.

¹³ Rudolph, *Gnosis*, 313–14.

¹⁴ Brakke, *The Gnostics*, 96.

¹⁵ González, *The Early Church*, 61.

disciple to prepare for his arrival.¹⁶ Marcion then attached himself to the local church, reportedly making a sizeable financial gift of 200,000 sesterces to the church's common fund, presumed to be utilized for charity to the poor.¹⁷ Eusebius reports that during the bishopric of Hyginus (circa AD 138 to AD 140),¹⁸ three prominent men arrived in Rome: Valentinus, Cerdon, and Marcion. All three were later declared heretics. Irenaeus said that Cerdon derived his antithetical doctrine from the followers of Simon Magus and taught that the God proclaimed within the Law and the Prophets was not the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. The first God was just, but Jesus's unknown God was good. Cerdon was famous for equivocating. He secretly taught his doctrines, recanted, then promoted them again until moral conviction of his perverse teachings prompted his separation from the church brethren.¹⁹ Marcion succeeded Cerdon and, without hesitation, used his predecessor's teachings to augment his own school.²⁰ He used his newfound standing in the Roman church as a platform to gain a following while propagating his teaching and a doctrinal system that he thought would place Christianity upon a more standardized basis.

¹⁶ Harnack, *Marcion*, 17.

¹⁷ Rudolph, *Gnosis*, 313–14. A gift of 200,000 sesterces is valued at approximately \$650,000 in gold-standard backed US Currency as of June 2022. Global Security, "How Much Is That in Real Money?" accessed June 16, 2022, <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/spqr/money-1.htm>.

¹⁸ uCatholic, "Pope Saint Hyginus," last modified January 11, 2021, <https://ucatholic.com/saints/hyginus/>; Eusebius of Pamphilus, *Hist. eccl.* 4.11.1 (Crusé, 117).

¹⁹ Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 4.11.1–2 (Crusé, 117). Eusebius describes the arrival and activity of Rome's heretical teachers:

(1) "Valentine came to Rome under Hyginus, was in his prime under Pius, and lived until the time of Anicetus. But Cerdon, who preceded Marcion, and flourished under the episcopate of Hyginus the ninth in succession, coming to the church, and acknowledging his error, continued in this way, at one time secretly teaching his doctrines, at another renouncing them again, sometimes also, convicted of his perverse doctrines, kept aloof from assembling with the brethren." (2) Such was the account of Irenaeus in the third book against the heresies. In the first, however, he related the following respecting Cerdon: "A certain man, however, by name Cerdon, who derived his first impulse from the followers of Simon, and who made some stay at Rome under Hyginus the ninth, that held the episcopate in succession from the apostles, taught that the God who had been proclaimed by the law and prophets was not the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for the latter was revealed, the other was unknown; the former also was just, but the other was Good. Marcion, who was from Pontus, having succeeded Cerdon, augmented his scull by uttering his blasphemies without a blush."

²⁰ Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 4.11.2 (Crusé, 117).

Instead, it led to his being regarded as one of the most influential heretics in Christian history.²¹

Marcion's Antithesis: Justin Martyr

Marcion's antithesis was his contemporary, Justin Martyr. Both men lived in the aftermath of the Bar Kokhba Palestinian revolt and taught in regions far removed from Palestine. Each proclaimed a different Christ based on the same need—separating contemporary Christians from the Jewish communities—and each used Scripture to accomplish this agenda amongst Gentile believers unfamiliar with Israel's Bible.²² Both shared the common desire to distance Jesus and his followers from second-century Judaism and its community by using a systematic de-Judaizing theology. However, they diverged in their evaluation of Israel's God and his writings.²³ Justin interpreted Jesus (the Logos) to be both the God of Israel and the one prophesied within Jewish Scripture, allegorizing Moses to foreshadow and prefigure Jesus's coming. He perceived the church as a replacement for Israel, the new covenant replacing the old, the gospel replacing the law, Eucharist replacing sacrifice, and baptism replacing circumcision. Justin recognized a bi-testamental unity through harmonious supersession of the former by the latter and coupled both Testaments with a philosophical approach, using Platonic language to present the gospel to Gentiles.²⁴

Justin sought to demonstrate that Christ was Israel's God who took a new people, while Marcion sought to show that Christianity owed its existence to a god

²¹ Kruger, *Christianity at the Crossroads*, 117.

²² David E. Wilhite, "Is Jesus YHWH? Two De-Judaizing Trajectories of Marcion and Justin," *Forum* 9, no. 1 (2020): 47, 50.

²³ Wilhite, "Is Jesus YHWH?," 29, 40.

²⁴ Wilhite, "Is Jesus YHWH?," 40–41.

unknown to Israel.²⁵ Justin preached the gospel using philosophy and wrote against Marcion while Marcion was alive. His writings confirm that Marcion taught a different god greater than Israel's God and that this greater god was the Father of Christ. Justin concluded that Marcionites called themselves Christian but had nothing in common with true Christianity.²⁶ Ultimately, Marcion's disjunction between the Testaments necessitated that Irenaeus oppose Marcionite Christianity and defend the Rule of Faith's proclamation that both Testaments declared the God of Israel is the Father of Jesus Christ.

Marcion's Differentiation from Gnosticism

Marcion's asceticism and proclamations of a docetic Jesus cause some to propose that he was a gnostic, which is not entirely accurate. Despite holding some commonalities, his beliefs dramatically diverged from the various second-century gnostic schools.²⁷ Brakke and Rudolph find no direct evidence proving Marcion had first-hand contact with gnostics or knew of their distinctive mythologies. Nevertheless, his deviation from gnostic belief implies knowledge of, and intentional differentiation from, Gnosticism:

1. Marcion did not utilize speculation and allegory.
2. Marcion sought to organize a credal, constitutional, service-driven church.
3. Marcion insisted on written revelation alone.

²⁵ Wilhite, "Is Jesus YHWH?," 47, 50.

²⁶ Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 4.11.9. (Crusé, 118–19). Justin describes the nature of Marcion's heresy:

And there is a certain Marcion of Pontus, who is even now teaching his disciples to believe in some other god greater than the Demiurge, who by the aid of the demons, has caused many of every race of men and women to speak blasphemies and to deny that God is the Maker of this Universe, and to profess that another, who is greater than He, has done greater works. All who take these opinions from these people, as we said before, are called Christians, just as also those philosophers who do not share the same views are, yet all called by one common name of philosophy. (Justin Martyr, *1 Apol.* 26 [Barnard, 37–38])

²⁷ Kruger, *Christianity at the Crossroads*, 119–20.

4. Marcion propagated a streamlined alternative to the gnostic mythology while simultaneously addressing the same concerns their mythos did.
5. Marcion assumed a unique Christian-Pauline interpretive teaching methodology, viewing himself as a continuator of the apostle Paul.²⁸

Only one report of Irenaeus has come to us that Marcion joined forces with the Syrian gnostic Cerdo(n), whose teachings later influenced him.²⁹ This report declared Marcion a contemporary of the heretical teacher Basilides and influenced by Cerdon during his tenure in Rome under Bishop Hyginus (AD 136–42). Cerdon's teaching famously advocated the antithesis between the Old Testament God and the God of Jesus Christ, declaring them two separate entities, an antithesis likewise propagated within various gnostic communities.³⁰ This explains the decision to declare Marcion a gnostic and the attempts to place him in relationship with the larger gnostic communities.³¹

Marcion's Canon of Scripture

What most distinguished Marcion from the gnostic groups was his divergent views concerning Jewish Scripture. The gnostics maintained a continual engagement with the Jewish sacred writings and used Jewish apocalypticism in their teachings and works. Thus they made themselves into a variant form of Judaism that rejected some of the core beliefs held by most Jews.³² Marcion believed the Old Testament was created by an inferior God and engaged in scathing criticisms of its teachings and stories, alleging they were incoherent, contradictory, and at odds with the New Testament, especially Jesus's

²⁸ Brakke, *The Gnostics*, 97; Rudolph, *Gnosis*, 313, 316.

²⁹ Harnack, *Marcion*, 19; Judith M. Lieu, *Marcion and the Making of a Heretic: God and Scripture in the Second Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 5.

³⁰ Rudolph, *Gnosis*, 313–14; Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 4.11.3 (Crusé, 117–18).

³¹ Lieu, *Marcion*, 5.

³² Brakke, *The Gnostics*, 97.

teachings contained within Luke's Gospel.³³ He set aside all Hebrew Scripture and proposed that the church cease using the Old Testament as the basis of Christian instruction and instead solely utilize the list of books he believed to be true Christian Scripture: the Gospel of Luke and ten Pauline Epistles. The latter inclusion was based on his belief that Paul was one of the few to understand Jesus's original message.³⁴ Nevertheless, Marcion purged all Old Testament quotations within these "authorized" works, claiming they were insertions by Judaizers seeking to subvert Jesus's original message.³⁵

Marcion drew his conclusions about Christian practice from his own beliefs.³⁶ His book of Luke began with Jesus's appearance in Capernaum during the fifteenth year of the principate of Tiberias. Likewise, his dogmatically edited Pauline Epistles were stripped of all passages suggesting that Israel's God was the Father of Jesus Christ; he believed it was his sacred task to purge these teachings by the God of Israel's followers. Marcion rejected the other three Gospels, along with Paul's Pastoral Epistles, as being too Jewish,³⁷ and Jesus's original disciples were declared Judaized, necessitating that the Father call Paul to restore Jesus's true gospel. What the Judaizers corrupted, Marcion decided must be restored to their true readings; there was no more law—there was only salvation by grace alone.³⁸

Marcion was a literalist who read the text in a straightforward manner as

³³ Kruger, *Christianity at the Crossroads*, 117–18.

³⁴ Brakke, *The Gnostics*, 98; González, *The Early Church*, 62.

³⁵ González, *The Early Church*, 62.

³⁶ Brakke, *The Gnostics*, 97–98.

³⁷ Everett Ferguson, "Marcion," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell, 2nd ed., Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 735; Jason David BeDuhn, "The Myth of Marcion as Redactor: The Evidence of 'Marcion's' Gospel against an Assumed Marcionite Redaction," *Annali di Storia* 29, no. 1 (2012): 24.

³⁸ Ferguson, "Marcion," 735.

opposed to considering typological or allegorical interpretations.³⁹ Other interpreters, including contemporary gnostics, addressed problematic passages in many ways, including the proposal that the law's only purpose was to lead people to Christ, making God's earlier interaction with humanity superfluous after Christ. Some passages became symbolic constructs whereby commands represented merely an ethical or religious principle. Marcion rejected all these methods with his declaration that Israel's God was neither the Father of Jesus nor the God of Christianity.⁴⁰

Marcion's non-surviving work, *Antithesis*, depicted contradictory propositions between the gospel and the law to demonstrate that a diversity of gods existed.⁴¹ What is known of these propositions is principally understood from Tertullian's five-volume refutation of Marcion. He accuses Marcion and his followers of daily altering their texts. This suggests Tertullian had personal knowledge of multiple versions of Marcionite writings.⁴² Rudolph and Brakke's studies indicate that Marcionites taught the New Testament as the revelation of the "Stranger" God⁴³ who sent his son (Jesus) into the world with a phantasmal body. This Stranger God allowed Jesus's access to the created realm to save humanity from Israel's God by dying on a cross. After death, Jesus descended to Hades to free those condemned under the Old Testament, but he left the righteous there for God. Thus, Jesus paid God's required penalty as an unsolicited act of mercy. However, receiving mercy came at the cost of total rejection of the law (since the law considers only its followers righteous) and the practice of a severely ascetic life. This asceticism was defined by Marcion's interpretation of Jesus's Sermon on the Mount and

³⁹ Kruger, *Christianity at the Crossroads*, 117–18.

⁴⁰ Brakke, *The Gnostics*, 97.

⁴¹ Kruger, *Christianity at the Crossroads*, 117–18.

⁴² Tim Carter, "Marcion's Christology and Its Possible Influence on Codex Bezae," *Journal of Theological Studies* 61, no. 2 (2010): 557.

⁴³ This is Marcion's designation for his New Testament God that is defined in chap. 2, sec. II: Marcionite Christianity. It is not Israel's God; it is the antithesis of Israel's God.

Marcion's own authoritative New Testament canon.⁴⁴

Marcion's Luke. Both Lieu and BeDuhn highlight that Marcion's Luke bears a strong resemblance to the canonical Luke, although it is shorter in several respects. Irenaeus indicated in *Haer.* 3.14.3 that Marcion's Luke is shorter than his own and that the Marcionites boast in using their remnant.⁴⁵ Significantly, Codex Bezae's Lukan resurrection narrative mostly corroborates and supports the Marcionite view of Jesus's body. Its shortened text excises all links between the risen Jesus and his crucified and buried physical body.⁴⁶ When Bezae Luke is read beside Marcion's Luke 24:30, the shorter readings coalesce to reveal a narrative that supports Marcionite Christology: Jesus's spirit left the phantom body at the cross, the body was buried, and Jesus's spirit visited the disciples to reveal his true nature to them. This narrative is consistent with Marcionite Christianity. Epiphanius's reading of Marcionite texts also confirms this docetic reading.⁴⁷ BeDuhn reminds readers, "If we take seriously the possibility that Marcion found a text already substantially in the shape in which he disseminated it, our next task would be to identify a setting in which a text such as the *Evangelion* would have been circulating for Marcion to encounter it."⁴⁸ Tertullian believed Marcion arrived in Rome with a gospel like what his canon used and that he found the expanded (and later canonized) Luke already circulating in Rome. The existence of two versions of Luke could explain Marcion's charge that the text was corrupted. By extension, Marcion's promotion of a shorter text could serve as the basis for Irenaeus's and Tertullian's

⁴⁴ Rudolph, *Gnosis*, 314–15; Brakke, *The Gnostics*, 97.

⁴⁵ Lieu, *Marcion*, 436; BeDuhn, "The Myth of Marcion as Redactor," 29; Irenaeus of Lyons, *Haer.* 3.14.3 (*ANF*, 1:437).

⁴⁶ Carter, "Marcion's Christology," 568.

⁴⁷ Carter, "Marcion's Christology," 571.

⁴⁸ BeDuhn, "The Myth of Marcion as Redactor," 36.

argument that Marcion had redacted Luke.⁴⁹ Analysis of early Latin Lukan texts establish an extensive list of parallel connections with Marcionite readings; therefore, unless it is suggested that the canonical text was highly dependent upon Marcion's version, the variants must antedate Marcion's editing. These connections shrink the amount of editorial work to less than one dozen passages in which the canonical Luke and Marcion's Luke differ. Consequently, it is possible to assume that the significant difference between Marcion and his Catholic antagonists (principally Tertullian) was the textual version used by each faction.⁵⁰

Marcion's Pauline Epistles. Similar uncertainty surrounds the form of the Pauline letters. Were they already a single collection or did Marcion merge some into a smaller corpus?⁵¹ Marcion's *Apostolikon* included Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Romans, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Ephesians (which Marcion titled Laodiceans), Colossians, Philippians, and Philemon.⁵² A similar sequence is also found in the Syrian work Codex Sinaiticus: Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Romans, Hebrews, Colossians, Ephesians, Philippians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon. The Codex Sinaiticus added writings to the corpus while preserving the original, similarly Marcionite order of the books. This suggests that Rome once possessed a pre-Marcionite collection of Pauline works transported to Aramaic Christianity and eventually utilized by Marcion.⁵³

Gilles Quispel notes John James Clabeaux's comparison of Marcion's

⁴⁹ BeDuhn, "The Myth of Marcion as Redactor," 37.

⁵⁰ BeDuhn, "The Myth of Marcion as Redactor," 23.

⁵¹ Lieu, *Marcion*, 436.

⁵² Gilles Quispel, "Marcion and the Text of the New Testament," *Vigiliae Christianae* 52, no. 4 (1998): 358.

⁵³ Quispel, "Marcion," 353–54.

Apostolikon to the *Vetus Latina*.⁵⁴ Clabeaux established that Marcion’s light revision of the authoritative Greek Pauline text used was the accepted version by the Roman Church. Its readings and variants agreed with the *Vetus Latina* Pauline manuscripts often cited by Tertullian and Epiphanius. This demonstrates that Marcion’s shorter texts were not intentional corruptions but were consistent with the source (the *Vetus Latina*) also used by his opponents. The Pauline collection used by Marcion, Tertullian, and Epiphanius was the “Western” text already found in Rome.⁵⁵ This smaller Pauline canon proved to be the only one used for the first half of the second century and matched Marcion’s *Apostolikon* in order. The most obvious difference in Marcion’s text is the omission of Romans chapters 15 and 16.⁵⁶ Those claiming that Marcion redacted texts to conform them to his views were not able to know this with certainty because they could not have known the condition and presentation of the actual texts in Marcion’s time and location. Instead, Marcion’s opponents, namely Tertullian and Epiphanius, assumed that their versions were the originals and Marcion’s altered. They did not recognize that it was equally valid for Marcion to assume his texts were original and theirs altered.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Quispel, “Marcion,” 349–50. Quispel explains what prompted his return to studying Marcion:

The first of the two publications which prompted me to return to Marcion was John J. Clabeaux’s 1983 Harvard dissertation (published in 1989). Clabeaux discussed a limited number of passages from Marcion’s *Apostolikon*, as preserved in two later works: the dialogue of Adamantius, *De recta fide* and Epiphanius in *Panarion* 42, and Tertullian’s citations in *Adversus Marcionem* book V. Clabeaux established that Marcion revised only lightly the authoritative, pre-Marcionite Greek text of Paul used and accepted by the ancient Christian congregation of Rome. Clabeaux pointed out that the readings and variants of this early Roman text agreed as often as not with the *Vetus Latina* manuscripts of Paul—all of which seem to derive (directly or indirectly) from Rome. This was a very important observation, for it led Clabeaux to two important insights. First, it demonstrated that the variants in these secondary (*viz.* Tertullian) and tertiary (*viz.* Epiphanius) witnesses to Marcion’s text were *not* variants which were “tendentious corruptions” of the text made by Marcion. How could they be, for the very same variants were often found in the manuscripts of the “orthodox” *Vetus Latina*? Second, since the text of the *Vetus Latina* found in Rome (the “Italic” and “European” sub-groups of the *Vetus Latina*) is regarded as belonging to the “Western” text-type, and Marcion’s text apparently shared the same variant readings as the *Vetus Latina*, Clabeaux concluded that the pre-Marcionite text of Paul in Rome had been of the “Western” text-type.

⁵⁵ Quispel, “Marcion,” 349.

⁵⁶ BeDuhn, “The Myth of Marcion as Redactor,” 23.

⁵⁷ BeDuhn, “The Myth of Marcion as Redactor,” 24.

Marcion's Confrontation with Roman Christianity

The church's most crucial decision was linking the New Testament with the LXX translation of the Hebrew Scriptures and its additional books.⁵⁸ During the first half of the second century, Roman Christians opposed a strong relationship between the Christian message and its Jewish origins. As evidenced by Clement's letter to Corinth and Justin Martyr's writings, Rome was deeply rooted in its claim of Jewish heritage and tradition; this motivated Roman Christians to relegate Paul to a minor place in Christian thought. However, Roman Christianity was only one strand within Christianity, and other communities saw Judaic Christianity as inadequate to the radical newness promised in Christ's message.⁵⁹ Marcion was in Rome during the timeframe of this ideological conflict, placing him at an optimal point to influence textual interpretation, especially of the Western text (represented by Codex Bezae). The Codex Bezae likely originated in the latter second century, and its form is well attested in early patristic citations.⁶⁰

Marcion's activity in Rome circa AD 140 reveals that he found fault in other versions of the Gospels circulating in Rome, both oral and written.⁶¹ Instead, he presented his followers an approved text containing "the Gospel and the Apostle" along with a systematic interpretation of Christianity's incompatibility with Jewish Scripture.⁶² Marcion promoted a literal reading of the Old Testament and differentiated between its demiurgic god and the completely unknown Stranger God revealed in the New Testament, who sought to free humanity from matter and enable them to enter the heavenly realm of spirit and light. Tertullian understood Marcion's charge of a corrupted

⁵⁸ Quispel, "Marcion," 358.

⁵⁹ BeDuhn, "The Myth of Marcion as Redactor," 43–44.

⁶⁰ Carter, "Marcion's Christology," 573.

⁶¹ Carter, "Marcion's Christology," 551; BeDuhn, "The Myth of Marcion as Redactor," 24.

⁶² BeDuhn, "The Myth of Marcion as Redactor," 26.

gospel as referring to the Roman version of Christianity, allegedly created by the Judaizers to unite the Law and Prophets to the person of Jesus Christ and claim that he had a beginning.⁶³ Marcion represented a version of Christianity at odds with the Roman form, enabling his followers to coalesce around their interpretation, just as other Christian sects in the region had their own ideological textual interpretations.⁶⁴

Marcion edited his works in a manner similar to the authors of Matthew and Luke's Gospels, who used and revised Mark's Gospel as their primary source.⁶⁵ Marcion believed his task was to recover the original form of the sacred documents he believed had been corrupted.⁶⁶ This view justified his community's use of a single Gospel, a practice common to most second-century Christian communities.⁶⁷ The Western non-interpolations of Codex Bezae, dated to the same timeframe of Marcion's Lukan editorials, demonstrates the modifications that supported his teachings, including Luke 24:39. This edited version shows an alteration support Marcionite docetic Christology, "proving" that Jesus rose from the dead without any help from Israel's God. This motivation is also present in the Pauline corpus.⁶⁸

⁶³ BeDuhn, "The Myth of Marcion as Redactor," 44–45.

⁶⁴ BeDuhn, "The Myth of Marcion as Redactor," 37; Brakke, *The Gnostics*, 98.

⁶⁵ Brakke, *The Gnostics*, 98.

⁶⁶ BeDuhn, "The Myth of Marcion as Redactor," 21; Harnack, *Marcion*, 17–18.

⁶⁷ Brakke, *The Gnostics*, 98; Kruger, *Christianity at the Crossroads*, 118.

⁶⁸ Carter, "Marcion's Christology," 550. Carter begins his study of Marcion by referencing Tertullian.

"For a spirit hath not bones, as ye see that I have not." This, according to Tertullian, is how Marcion abbreviated and interpreted the words Jesus spoke to his disciples in Luke 24:39. The disciples are invited to examine the hands and feet of Jesus to verify that, like a spirit, he has no bones. In contrast to the stress on Jesus' corporeality in canonical Luke, Marcion saw the risen Jesus as an insubstantial figure—at least, if Tertullian is to be believed. (Carter, 550)

Gilles Quispel makes the following observation about Marcion's Pauline canon:

One should know that in the Pauline corpus of Marcion the words "and through God the Father" have not been written, because he wanted to stress his point that Christ has not been raised by God the Father but arose spontaneously through his own strength. This is a very trustworthy tradition. As a Christo-monistic thinker, Marcion wanted to underline that Jesus rose from the dead without any help from the inferior demiurge. We may be sure that Marcion intentionally omitted the words *καὶ θεοῦ πατρὸς* from his text of Paul's Letter to the Galatians. (Quispel, "Marcion," 352–53)

A formal hearing on Marcion's teachings was the first of its kind in early church history. During the summer of AD 144, Marcion demanded Rome's presbyters take a stand regarding his writings and teachings. Marcion used Luke 5:36 and 6:43 to make his arguments. The hearing ended with the Roman Church's sharp rejection of Marcion's unprecedented teachings, his expulsion from the Roman Church at large, and his contribution of 200,000 sesterces returned. The Roman church determined that his teachings contradicted several fundamental points within Christian doctrine, and they rejected Marcion's push for greater unity within the churches. Although it is unclear whether Rome excommunicated Marcion first, or vice versa, the withdrawal of communion marked him as not of the Roman Church. However, it did not eliminate Marcion as a rival to its teachings.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, Marcion used his wealth and organizational abilities to create his own international church network that lasted for centuries, rivaling emerging Catholic Christianity.⁷⁰

Marcion's Legacy

Preoccupied with God's nature, the created order, the nature of humanity, and discovering how to answer the resultant questions, Marcion viewed himself as a thoroughly Christian thinker with the right answers. He proclaimed divine intervention through the life, death, and resurrection of one superior to and unconstrained by human needs and called everyone to accept this offer of freedom from human constraints.⁷¹ Although viewed as part of the gnostic heresy, Marcionites posed a greater threat to the second-century church than did the gnostics, despite both groups rejecting or radically reinterpreting the doctrines of creation, incarnation, and resurrection. Marcion's threat consisted of an organized rival church with its own bishops and scripture; his church

⁶⁹ Ferguson, "Marcion," 735; Harnack, *Marcion*, 18.

⁷⁰ González, *The Early Church*, 61.

⁷¹ Lieu, *Marcion*, 434.

achieved a measure of success for several years, and even after it was clearly defeated, it continued to exist for centuries.⁷² No records exist indicating Marcion's final fate, however his career lasted approximately fifteen years after the Roman synod, and his death is believed to predate the beginning of Marcus Aurelius's imperial reign (circa AD 160 to 181). Marcion sought to expand his teachings throughout the Roman Empire, and by circa AD 150, Justin Martyr complained that Marcionite influence had spread throughout the entire human race, prompting him to place Marcion beside the heretics Simon Magus and Menander.⁷³

By the age of the Antonine Emperors, the Marcionite Church established itself as a corporate body containing multiple well-ordered congregations that operated as "The Church of Jesus Christ" and propagated their founder's Paulinist teachings.⁷⁴ Viewing the breaking of fellowship between Marcion and the Roman Church as its founding, they used July of AD 144 to declare the time between Jesus and Marcion at 155 years and 6 and ½ months.⁷⁵ Two generations after the founding of the Marcionite Church, even Tertullian of Carthage could not deny the singular impact of the man who stood before Rome's presbyters to expound his belief that the Roman Church's interpretation of

⁷² González, *The Early Church*, 62.

⁷³ Rudolph, *Gnosis*, 313–14. Rudolph points to Justin Martyr's condemnation of Marcion as a fellow heretic of Magus and Menander:

And, as we said before, the wicked demons have put forward Marcion of Pontus, who is even now teaching people to deny that God is the Maker of all things in heaven and earth and that the Christ predicted through the prophets is His Son and proclaims another god besides the Demiurge of all and likewise another son. Many are persuaded by him as if he alone knew the truth, and laugh at us, though they have no proof of the things they say but are snatched away irrationally as lambs by a wolf and become the prey of godless teaching and of demons. For those who are called demons strive for nothing else than to take away people from God who made them and from Christ his First-begotten; and those who cannot raise themselves above the earth they have pinned down by [the worship of] earthly things and the works of men's hands; and they even trip up those who devote themselves to the contemplation of things divine; unless they have a wise prudence and a pure and passionless life, and drive them into ungodliness. (Justin Martyr, *1 Apol.* 58 [Barnard, 57])

⁷⁴ Harnack, *Marcion*, 19.

⁷⁵ Harnack, *Marcion*, 19.

Christianity was wrongfully influenced by the Judaizers.⁷⁶

II: Marcionite Christianity

Though he was a successful church organizer, Marcion's writings are now lost, forcing historians to rely on patristic sources to discover his teachings and beliefs.

Nevertheless, the most important points of Marcionite Christianity are clear.⁷⁷ Since

Marcion had a profound disdain for Judaism and the material world, he developed an understanding of Christianity that was simultaneously anti-material and anti-Jewish.⁷⁸

Despite rejecting the Jewish canon and practicing asceticism, which distinguished Marcionites from other Christian communities, Rome's Christian communities did not reject his teaching until he sought to impose his views of unity and uniformity upon other church communities. Marcion's demand that they align with his doctrinal teachings broke the tenuous unity-diversity balance between Marcionite Christianity and Roman Christianity.⁷⁹

Marcion's theology focused on his interpretation of the Old Testament and his belief that Israel's God was vengeful, wrathful, unpeaceful, unmerciful, unloving, unforgiving, and ungracious. This did not accord with the apostle Paul's description of

⁷⁶ Harnack, *Marcion*, 18.

⁷⁷ Brakke, *The Gnostics*, 96.

⁷⁸ González, *The Early Church*, 61–62.

⁷⁹ Brakke, *The Gnostics*, 99. Brakke notes the argument of Lampe and Thomassen to explain why the break between Marcionite Christianity and Roman Christianity happened:

As Peter Lampe and Einar Thomassen have argued, we learn from Marcion's experience that during the middle decades of the second century the fractionated Roman Christian community generally tolerated diversity among its different groups. Marcion's complete rejection of the Jewish Scriptures and his asceticism distinguished his community clearly from other Christian circles, and yet there was no decisive break between Marcion and other Christians until Marcion himself sought to bring other communities into line with his teachings. Marcion upset the delicate balance between the unity and diversity by seeking to impose greater unity and uniformity among Roman Christians than they wanted. And, of course, the beliefs and practices on which he sought to base that unity were not acceptable to other Christians. Marcion's theological difference and his push for unity led to withdrawal of fellowship. The withdrawal of communion could be an effective means of differentiating one's own Christian group from another, but in Marcion's case it was hardly effective in eliminating one's rival groups.

the Father of Jesus Christ. Because the Old Testament God was strictly law-centered, he was the physical world's Creator but not Jesus's God. Consequently, Israel's God was not the Christian God. This antithesis between Old and New Testaments held multiple implications for Marcionite Christianity.⁸⁰ Irenaeus defined its key propositions:

1. Denigration of the God of the Law and the Prophets
2. Jesus sent from a Father who is different from and above the Creator
3. Jesus came to Judea in the time of Pontius Pilate.
4. Jesus's task was the abolition of the works of the Creator, including the Law and the Prophets.
5. Selective use of an edited Gospel of Luke and Pauline letters
6. Only souls can experience salvation, not bodies.
7. At Jesus's post-mortem descent into Hades, Cain and those usually considered examples of unrepentant iniquity were saved, while the righteous before and after Abraham rejected the salvation Jesus offered.

It should be noted that propositions 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6 are the original nucleus of Marcionite doctrine. Propositions 5 and 7 are believed to be expansions of the original nucleus, though it is unknown whether the expansions were by Irenaeus or an earlier source.⁸¹

Rejection of the Old Testament

Marcion used Jewish tradition as a foil for his presentation of Christianity as entirely new and distinct.⁸² Like the gnostics, he viewed Jewish Scripture as inspired by a god who was not the Supreme Father. However, he departed from gnostic belief on the value of Jewish Scripture. Whereas the gnostics considered Jewish Scripture a flawed witness that still contained divine revelatory guidance granting insight into salvation history, Marcion fully accepted the Old Testament's authenticity as the words of an

⁸⁰ Kruger, *Christianity at the Crossroads*, 117.

⁸¹ Lieu, *Marcion*, 35.

⁸² Brakke, *The Gnostics*, 98.

arbitrary, judgment-wielding Jewish God. This God, Yahweh, allowed and even worked evil in the material realm because he was different from and inferior to the Christian God. This belief fueled Marcion's rejection of Jewish Scripture as contrary to the gospel. He considered it nonbinding on and irrelevant to Christianity. This further reinforced the contrast between Marcionites and Jewish Christians, who embraced the Old Testament as a vital component of their dual Jewish and Christian heritage.⁸³

Marcion resonated with the apostle Paul's writings and teachings that described Christians as no longer bound by the Mosaic system (Gal 3:2; 5:1) and declared these teachings justification for rejecting the Old Testament God. Marcion believed only Paul understood the gospel's truly radical nature, unlike the apostle James and other church leaders.⁸⁴

Rejection of Israel's God

Marcion's conviction that the material world was evil fueled his conclusion that the demiurgic Creator, Israel's God Yahweh, must be evil or ignorant.⁸⁵ Israel's God was the antithesis of the Father God of Jesus. The God of the Old Testament created and ruled the world in a merciless and retaliatory fashion; he was bereft of goodness and as imperfect and despicable as his own creation.⁸⁶ Likewise, the gnostics considered the demiurgic Creator, a ruler they called Ialdabaoth, to be arrogant, foolish, and even demonic, and his actions towards humanity at least amoral or more likely immoral. Unlike Ialdabaoth, Israel's vindictive and arbitrary God required obedience by constantly keeping account of and punishing those who disobeyed him; he was not intentionally evil

⁸³ González, *The Early Church*, 61; Brakke, *The Gnostics*, 97; Kruger, *Christianity at the Crossroads*, 117–18; Ferguson, "Marcion," 735.

⁸⁴ Kruger, *Christianity at the Crossroads*, 118.

⁸⁵ González, *The Early Church*, 61.

⁸⁶ Rudolph, *Gnosis*, 313.

because his moral demands upon humanity were right. Rather, the problem was that his standards were so high and his punishments so severe, no one could avoid eternal damnation. His regime resembled earthly authoritarian rulership.⁸⁷

Proclamation of an Unknown God

Contemporary gnostic systems posited a series of spiritual beings culminating in their demiurgic creator. This disfigured, distant offspring of true divinity possessed only dim awareness of true spiritual reality, which he used to create the imperfect material universe he ruled over. However, Marcion's demiurge possessed no spiritual genealogy or relational connection to his supreme God, the Stranger God.⁸⁸ Both groups shared the widespread Platonized assumption that their supreme deities were utterly perfect, transcendent, and unknown to the world before Jesus arrived. Marcion's Stranger God created a spiritual world in contrast to and far above the material realm created by Yahweh. The Stranger God gave everything freely, including salvation, because he was not vindictive but sought only to be loved in return. Consequently, his compassion for Yahweh's creatures motivated him to send Jesus as his emissary to save humanity by meeting Yahweh's demand for retribution.⁸⁹ Because the Stranger God lived within a heavenly realm separate from and above Yahweh's domain, his perfect goodness, mercy, and other essential attributes were rendered unidentifiable by limited earthly understanding. In contrast, Israel's God Yahweh could be known by humans because they understood and identified with his inherent imperfections and limitations.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ González, *The Early Church*, 61; Brakke, *The Gnostics*, 97; David W. Bercot, ed., *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs: A Reference Guide to More than 700 Topics Discussed by the Early Church Fathers* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 419.

⁸⁸ Brakke, *The Gnostics*, 97; González, *The Early Church*, 61.

⁸⁹ González, *The Early Church*, 61; Brakke, *The Gnostics*, 97; Ferguson, "Marcion," 735.

⁹⁰ Rudolph, *Gnosis*, 314–15.

Denial of the Humanity of Jesus

Marcion denied that Jesus Christ was the Messiah prophesied in the Old Testament and believed the Jews should continue to expect an overt military founding of their own Messianic kingdom. Jesus was a revelation of the Stranger God,⁹¹ who came in the appearance of an adult man during the reign of Tiberius. He offered humanity the Stranger God's love and forgiveness by abolishing Yahweh's Law and Prophets and freeing everyone from sin and its power; humanity would be forgiven and suffer no judgment.⁹² Marcion viewed Christ's apparent death and crucifixion as resulting from the ignorance of Yahweh and his minions, who viewed Jesus as a criminal. However, Jesus's very innocence allowed him to curse the law and the lawgiver (Yahweh), purchase Yahweh's forsaken creation, and offer escape from Yahweh and his tyrannical reign.⁹³

Marcion rejected the incarnation because it would have made Jesus subject to the created realm of Israel's God. Jesus could not have been born from Mary because incarnation would have made him a slave to Yahweh. Marcion believed procreation was disgraceful; a truly divine being could not participate in or originate through even miraculous procreative means. Therefore, Jesus must have come from another world, unable to be bound by the created realm, and only appeared to take on human flesh. Marcion's Christology was docetic: Jesus could not be truly human but only look like one.

Marcion never clarified how he envisaged the nature of Jesus's body. He referred to the Genesis 19 account of angels visiting Abraham with bodies that seemed human and could talk, eat, and work. He used the same Greek concept, *φάντασμα*, to

⁹¹ Ferguson, "Marcion," 735; Kruger, *Christianity at the Crossroads*, 119; Harnack, *Marcion*, 79.

⁹² González, *The Early Church*, 61; Kruger, *Christianity at the Crossroads*, 119; Brakke, *The Gnostics*, 97; Harnack, *Marcion*, 45.

⁹³ Harnack, *Marcion*, 87.

describe the angelic bodies and Christ's body.⁹⁴ Tertullian verifies that Marcion believed Christ's flesh was merely phantasmal, only seeming corporeal, and that Christ was never born of flesh and therefore never incarnate.⁹⁵ This Marcionite Christ functioned like various Mediterranean gods, only taking tangible human form as needed. This stood in stark contrast to the Jewish understanding of the human body and notions of divine transcendence.⁹⁶ While the heresy charge against Marcion was ditheism, docetism was an intrinsic part of his two gods, two Testaments argument.⁹⁷

Proclamation of an Ascetic Message

Marcion's rejection of the material world was accompanied by asceticism; his followers were well-known for rejecting fleshly things, fasting often, following strict diets that forbade meat and wine, and refusing to marry or engage in sex if already married.⁹⁸ These abstentions were targeted against the Creator; in rejecting the use of wine to represent the blood—and therefore *flesh*—of Christ, Marcion implemented a water-based Eucharist celebration to further offend him.⁹⁹ Marcionites believed that by refusing to marry or engage in procreation, they were limiting the demiurge's realm, as the creation of new human subjects would only bring more death into existence. Fasting and dieting limited their dependence upon his realm for bodily sustenance.¹⁰⁰ Marcionites believed matter to be inherently evil; the Creator's use of matter to fabricate the world

⁹⁴ Wilhite, "Is Jesus YHWH?," 50; Harnack, *Marcion*, 85.

⁹⁵ Peter Head, "The Foreign God and the Sudden Christ: Theology and Christology in Marcion's Gospel Redaction," *Tyndale Bulletin* 44, no. 2 (1993): 313.

⁹⁶ Wilhite, "Is Jesus YHWH?," 31.

⁹⁷ David E. Wilhite, "Was Marcion a Docetist? The Body of Evidence vs. Tertullian's Argument," *Vigiliae Christianae* 71, no. 1 (2017): 8.

⁹⁸ Kruger, *Christianity at the Crossroads*, 119–20; Harnack, *Marcion*, 96.

⁹⁹ Brakke, *The Gnostics*, 98; Harnack, *Marcion*, 93.

¹⁰⁰ Harnack, *Marcion*, 96–97.

made him guilty by association, despite his being perfectly righteous in his law and attitudes.¹⁰¹ Notwithstanding these peculiarities, Marcionite churches also instituted practices that were routine in any other Gentile church, including baptisms considered valid by the Roman Church.¹⁰²

Advancement of Marcionite Theology

Marcionite doctrine construed Galatians 4:26 to indicate two different dispensations: the demiurgic Creator and his synagogue, and the Stranger God, whose church was the mother of Marcionite Christianity and the source of redemption.¹⁰³ Inherent in this ideology was the concept that the unredeemed, including Gentiles, are hostage to the Law and Prophets and must take on Jewish identity and belief to obtain his blessings.¹⁰⁴ Despite this opposition between the demiurgic Creator and the Stranger God, Marcionites did not segregate themselves from the surrounding church community but acted as missionaries seeking to absorb the entirety of the church into itself. Their worship services were open to everyone (including pagans), and Marcionite churches existed in cities and the countryside, utilizing an organization containing bishops, deacons, elders, and laity.¹⁰⁵ Marcion considered his church's message to be pure biblical theology. The church used two canons, one positive and one negative, to explain its differentiation from the larger Christian community.¹⁰⁶ The positive canon included Marcion's Gospel and Apostle; the Old Testament formed the negative canon.

¹⁰¹ Harnack, *Marcion*, 71.

¹⁰² Wilhite, "Is Jesus YHWH?," 39; Harnack, *Marcion*, 93.

¹⁰³ Harnack, *Marcion*, 93.

¹⁰⁴ Harnack, *Marcion*, 73–74.

¹⁰⁵ Harnack, *Marcion*, 95, 99.

¹⁰⁶ Harnack, *Marcion*, 65.

Threatens the Church at Large

From circa AD 150 to 190, Marcionite Christianity represented a belief system that was becoming increasingly antithetical to orthodox Christian thought, and the church was forced to take a stand. Though Irenaeus originally intended to oppose the Valentinians and other gnostics, he was compelled to address the Marcionites as well.¹⁰⁷ Irenaeus noted the fundamental principles of Marcionite schools:

1. Acknowledgement of the Bible assembled by the founder and the accompanying proof text, *Antitheses*¹⁰⁸
2. Rejection of the God of Israel and the Old Testament
3. Proclamation of the alien (Stranger) God, who had appeared redemptively in Christ
4. Strict asceticism
5. High esteem of their founder, Marcion¹⁰⁹

Harnack collates the various church fathers' oppositional writings and observes that though Marcionite Christianity was receding in the West by the mid-third century, it endured much longer in the Orient where its members experienced greater persecution and martyrdom. The fourth century saw its suppression in Egypt, Western Asia Minor, and Greek Syria thanks to the efforts of Chrysostom, who opposed a Marcionite Antioch high official. History records that the Marcionite movement lasted longest in Cyprus, Palestine, Syriac Syria, and Laodicea, until the church, seeking to root out Marcionite thinking, required these regions to add to their confession the words, "God of the law and the Gospel, just and good."¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Harnack, *Marcion*, 100.

¹⁰⁸ *Antitheses* was Marcion's non-surviving work that taught his followers how to prove that Israel's God was not the Father of Jesus and that each Testament belonged to its respective God.

¹⁰⁹ Harnack, *Marcion*, 104.

¹¹⁰ Harnack, *Marcion*, 101.

Summary

Because there are no surviving writings from Marcion's own hand, what is known about him is revealed by his opponents, none of whom paint a singular or consistent picture of the man. Irenaeus wrote within twenty to thirty years of Marcion's death and viewed him as an iconic figure whose principles and doctrines directly opposed authentic Christian truth.¹¹¹ Accordingly, Irenaeus's construction of Marcion was an apologetic device to defend what Irenaeus believed were the bulwarks of a specific second-century Christian identity.¹¹² Marcion's blasphemy was proclaiming two gods: the God of the Law and Prophets, who authored evil and delighted in war, and whose works (including creation) and precepts had to be abolished by Jesus, son of the Stranger God.¹¹³ However, this belief refuted the very concept of deity.¹¹⁴ Worse still was Marcion's removal of all accounts of the incarnation and portions of Jesus's teaching from Luke, his rejection of the fourfold Gospel narrative, and his editorial purging of these proofs from Paul's letters. Marcion eliminated Scripture that had been declared common to all apostles and disciples of the Lord and added self-proclaimed revelation received generations after Christ.

Irenaeus knew it was essential to oppose Marcion and define the boundaries between Christian truth and Marcion's heresy.¹¹⁵ He was compelled to defend the doctrine of salvation as handed down by the apostles and experienced by the church. He would contrast Marcion's singular interpretation of Paul's writings to the Catholic

¹¹¹ Lieu, *Marcion*, 7, 27.

¹¹² Lieu, *Marcion*, 29.

¹¹³ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.27.2 (*ANF*, 1:352).

¹¹⁴ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.25.3 (*ANF*, 1:459).

¹¹⁵ Lieu, *Marcion*, 34, 42, 44.

Church's interpretation of what all the apostles, including Paul, proclaimed about God and Jesus. He would prove it from both Testaments.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ Lieu, *Marcion*, 43.

CHAPTER 3

IRENÆUS'S HISTORICAL IMPORTANCE

Irenaeus's importance rests upon three foundations: his apostolic connections and credentials, his literary contributions, and his hermeneutical legacy. He was the instrumental witness of the late second century's post-sub-apostolic period of early Christianity. Those who had seen and heard Jesus, and the following generation who learned directly from the apostles, were dead. Theologian Theodoret of Cyrhus considered Irenaeus a shining light amongst the Gauls because Irenaeus had benefited from the teaching of Polycarp, who had known the apostles. Irenaeus was one of the last Christian writers to plausibly claim direct access to apostolic sources.¹ He was the first to fully articulate what constituted orthodoxy and heresy based on his knowledge of the sects and schismatics who rejected participation in the Roman Christian community. Originally seeking to equip a fellow cleric in Rome with information on a diversity of heretical teachings, Irenaeus systematically addressed each teaching in a series of five books collectively called *Against Heresies*.² Thanks to these writings, Irenaeus is considered the principal architect of Christian identity. He believed that Christianity originated as a uniform religion that subsequently was diversified and diluted by heretical teaching; his writings maintain the integral nature of both Testaments in the Christian Bible.³ Two thousand years later, his thinking continues to shape the universal church's

¹ Sara Parvis and Paul Foster, eds., "Introduction: Irenaeus and His Traditions," in *Irenaeus: Life, Scripture, Legacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 1.

² John Behr, *Irenaeus of Lyons: Identifying Christianity*, Christian Theology in Context (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 205; Jared Secord, "The Cultural Geography of a Greek Christian: Irenaeus from Smyrna to Leon," in Parvis and Foster, *Irenaeus*, 29.

³ Mary Ann Donovan, *One Right Reading? A Guide to Irenaeus* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical

understanding of Scripture, exegesis, theology, institutions, and spirituality.⁴

I: Biographical Context

The apostles founded churches in Rome, Ephesus, and Smyrna, the birthplace of Irenaeus (circa AD 130); these areas repeatedly appear in his life and work.⁵ Irenaeus designated the apostolic churches and the church at Corinth as “central regions of the world,” a unified network planted by the apostles and maintained by their successors, including Irenaeus; their job was to maintain the unified message of Christianity as “islands of Christ” floating amidst the Roman Empire.⁶

The Roman Christian community consisted of various groups that had existed from the AD 50s, when the apostle Paul wrote to them and expected them to circulate his communique amongst one another. Likewise, Ignatius’s epistle to the city is addressed to the churches in Rome and expects similar circulation.⁷ Irenaeus moved and taught within these communities at the time of Polycarp’s death and eventually settled in Lyons. Polycarp had visited Rome two years before his martyrdom to confer with Anicetus on the Easter celebration controversy. He was a dominating influence in Irenaeus’s youth, and Irenaeus followed his pattern of bishopric.⁸ Beyond Irenaeus’s connection to the apostle John through Polycarp, he possessed connections to the apostles Peter and Paul because of the region into which he was born.

Press, 1997), 3.

⁴ David Brakke, *The Gnostics: Myth, Ritual, and Diversity in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), 3; Donovan, *One Right Reading?*, 3.

⁵ Everett Ferguson, “Irenaeus,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell, 2nd ed., Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 616; Donovan, *One Right Reading?*, 8–9; Secord, “The Cultural Geography of a Greek Christian,” 27.

⁶ Donovan, *One Right Reading?*, 8; Secord, “The Cultural Geography of a Greek Christian,” 27, 29.

⁷ Behr, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 22, 105.

⁸ Eric Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 3.

Apostolic Predecessors

Irenaeus's birth city of Smyrna⁹ in the Roman province of Asia¹⁰ connected him to at least three apostles and three apostolic fathers. Peter's apostolic influence began with the delivery of his sermon at Pentecost to multiple groups, including seven from Asia Minor.¹¹ Peter's influence continued to be felt in at least five of these provinces through his first epistle,¹² written between AD 60–64,¹³ and his second epistle, which preceded his death between circa AD 65–67.¹⁴ Figure 2 depicts the provinces of the Roman Empire. The New Testament records that Peter influenced at least fourteen provinces and three non-Roman territories.

⁹ Ferguson, "Irenaeus," 616.

¹⁰ Rev 1:4; 2:8.

¹¹ See Acts 2:1–11, especially verses 7–11, listing those who heard Peter's message in their own tongue:

And they were all amazed and marveled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galileans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the Parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and Proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.

¹² Peter writes to the "strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia" (1 Pet 1:1).

¹³ *New World Encyclopedia*, "First Epistle of Peter," last modified April 11, 2017, https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/First_Epistle_of_Peter.

¹⁴ *New World Encyclopedia*, "First Epistle of Peter."



Figure 2: Provinces of the Roman Empire¹⁵

In addition to Peter’s ministry, the book of Acts records the apostle Paul’s three missionary journeys. Paul visited cities in nine different Roman provinces before traveling to Rome as a prisoner on his way to appeal his case to Caesar.¹⁶ Through his missionary journeys and his epistles, Paul is known to have impacted eleven Roman provinces, five of which were in Anatolia.

¹⁵ UNRV, “Provinces of the Roman Empire,” accessed April 18, 2022, <https://www.unrv.com/province-large.php>.

¹⁶ Ryan Nelson, “Paul’s Missionary Journeys: The Beginner’s Guide,” last modified July 6, 2020, <https://overviewbible.com/pauls-missionary-journeys/>. Paul’s first missionary journey included Syria, Cyprus, Pamphylia, Phrygia, and Lycaonia; his second missionary journey included Lycaonia, Phrygia, Galatia, Asia, Macedonia, and Achaia; his third missionary journey included Phrygia, Galatia, Asia, and Macedonia.



Figure 3: John’s apostolic footprint¹⁷

The apostle John is the bridge connecting Irenaeus to the apostles Peter and Paul. While John’s known regional ministry was limited, his immediate and inherited influences defined Irenaeus’s worldview. William Steuart McBirnie notes,

His epistles reveal he rose to a position of influence within worldwide Christianity and shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem moved to Ephesus in Asia Minor. At this strategic location he became the pastor of the church in Ephesus and had a special relationship to other churches in the area as we know from his letters to the seven churches in Asia . . . John died peacefully in Ephesus at an advanced age, around AD 100.¹⁸

Eusebius reported that John was condemned to the island of Patmos for his testimony of the divine Word and cites Irenaeus’s attestation that John’s time on Patmos

¹⁷ Bibleinfo, “What Are the 7 Churches of Revelation?,” accessed May 31, 2022, https://res.cloudinary.com/vop/image/upload/v1612395653/7-churches-red-small_na8eqs.jpg.

¹⁸ William Steuart McBirnie, *The Search for the Twelve Apostles* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2004), 80–81.

was “almost in our own generation,” at the close of Domitian’s reign.¹⁹ Eusebius also attested to John’s governance of the Asian churches after his return from exile upon Domitian’s death. He cited both Irenaeus of Lyons and Clement of Alexandria as witnesses to this fact.²⁰ Finally, Eusebius recorded correspondence from the Ephesian Bishop Polycrates to the Roman Bishop Victor in which Polycrates mentions John’s death and internment at Ephesus along with that of the apostle Philip at Hierapolis.²¹ John’s students Ignatius, Papias, and Polycarp continued the apostle’s ministry after his death. Polycarp served as Irenaeus’s mentor, directly connecting him to the apostle John and his ministry.

Relationship to Polycarp

The second-century Christian church continued to wrestle with its past and present relationship to Judaism.²² To counter gnostic claims that the original apostles passed secrets along to a select few, Irenaeus developed the concept of apostolic succession. He argued that the apostles did not transmit teachings clandestinely but openly to the men they appointed as bishops. This handing down of public teaching from teacher to student ensured uniformity amongst all ministers and guaranteed that only genuine apostolic tradition was transmitted. He used the church in Rome to illustrate this

¹⁹ Eusebius Pamphilus, *Hist. eccl.* 3.18.1–3 (Crusé, 83). Eusebius describes the nature of John’s persecution and punishment:

(1) In this persecution, it is handed down by tradition that the apostle and Evangelist John, who was yet living, in consequence of his testimony to the divine word, was condemned to dwell on the island of Patmos. (2) Irenaeus, in his fifth book against the heresies, where he spoke of the calculation formed on the epithet of the antichrist in the above mentioned revelation of John spoke in the following manner respecting him: (3) “IF however, it were necessary to proclaim his name (i.e. the Antichrist) openly at the present time, it would have been declared by him who saw the revelation, for it is not long since it was seen, but almost in our own generation, at the close of Domitian’s reign.”

²⁰ Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.23.1–5 (Crusé, 86).

²¹ Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.24.1–4 (Crusé, 182).

²² Parvis and Foster, “Introduction,” 1.

point.²³ Irenaeus twice cites his relationship to Polycarp of Smyrna, whom he heard while a youth, and links himself to the apostolic age; he establishes his apostolic authority both as Bishop of Lyons and Gaul (circa AD 180) and as mediator between Rome and Asia Minor in the Montanist and Quartodeciman disputes.²⁴ Eusebius recorded an excerpt from Irenaeus's epistle to Florinus to oppose the heresy that God was the author of evil;²⁵ this excerpt demonstrates Irenaeus's intimacy with Polycarp.²⁶

Polycarp's significance as a presbyter rests on the discipleship he received from the original apostles. In the AD 150s, he convinced many in Rome to turn from Marcionite and Valentinian heresies by claiming that what he preached he received directly through apostolic connection.²⁷ Additionally, the Moscow manuscript edition of *Martyrdom of Polycarp* mentions the migration of Christians from Asia Minor and Irenaeus's travels to Rome either just before or in tandem with Polycarp's visit, reaffirming his importance to Irenaeus.²⁸ Irenaeus claimed that Polycarp had direct contact only with the apostle John. John is known to have resided in Asia Minor and lived to an old age. As the standard date of Polycarp's martyrdom is AD 155–56, it is

²³ Ferguson, "Irenaeus," 616.

²⁴ Paul Parvis, "Who Was Irenaeus? An Introduction to the Man and His Work," in Parvis and Foster, *Irenaeus*, 13–14; Ferguson, "Irenaeus," 616; Donovan, *One Right Reading?*, 9.

²⁵ Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.20.1 (Crusé, 178).

²⁶ Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.20.4–8 (Crusé, 178). Irenaeus recounts that he and Florinus were students of Polycarp and learned from him the teachings of the apostle John and those who personally saw the Lord. So memorable were these teachings that he could recall them later in life even without them having been recorded on paper.

²⁷ Behr, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 57–58. See also Irenaeus of Lyons, *Haer.* 3.3.4 (*ANF*, 1:416). Behr's observation of Polycarp's importance to Irenaeus comes from the bishop's own writing:

But Polycarp also was not only instructed by apostles, and conversed with many who had seen Christ, but was also, by apostles in Asia, appointed bishop of the Church in Smyrna, whom I also saw in my early youth, for he tarried [on earth] a very long time, and, when a very old man, gloriously and most nobly suffering martyrdom, departed this life, having always taught the things which he had learned from the apostles, and which the Church has handed down, and which alone are true. To these things all the Asiatic Churches testify, as do also those men who have succeeded Polycarp down to the present time—a man who was of much greater weight, and a more steadfast witness of truth, than Valentinus, and Marcion, and the rest of the heretics.

²⁸ Behr, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 67.

chronologically possible for an eighty-six-year-old Polycarp to have encountered the apostle John during his life and ministry.²⁹

Irenaeus commanded the church presbyters to submit to bishops and implied that orthodoxy required accepting the bishop's authority in teaching and sacramental practice. This limited the right and responsibility of interpreting the Rule of Faith and Christian doctrine to the bishops possessing apostolic succession.³⁰ He illustrated this principle of succession using both Rome and Smyrna as exhibits, including the apostle John and his disciple Polycarp as a demonstration of apostolic succession in practice.³¹ This enabled Irenaeus to declare the Valentinians a threat, as their assemblies were separate from apostolically succeeded and governed churches, and their lifestyle, sacraments, and exegesis were beyond bishopric authority.³² Furthermore, Irenaeus would rebut Marcionite teaching in multiple chapters of his books, creating an apology demonstrating that the apostolic hermeneutic included both Testaments speaking of the same God, the Creator and the Father of Jesus Christ.³³ Several chapters suggest that Polycarp was familiar with Marcion's *Antitheses* and was able to turn many in Rome away from Marcionite heresy. Irenaeus's transmissions of Polycarp's teachings ensured that his readers had access to a tradition originating with the apostle John.³⁴

“[Since] Irenaeus believed that the apostolic message was already perfect at Pentecost, consequently, apostolic tradition is identical with truth itself (*A.H.* III.1.1, 3),

²⁹ Behr, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 58–59.

³⁰ Charles E. Hill, “The Man Who Needed No Introduction: A Response to Sebastian Moll,” in Parvis and Foster, *Irenaeus*, 103; Donovan, *One Right Reading?*, 64.

³¹ Hill, “The Man Who Needed No Introduction,” 103.

³² Donovan, *One Right Reading?*, 64.

³³ Sebastian Moll, “The Man with No Name: Who Is the Elder in Irenaeus's *Adversus haereses* IV?,” in Parvis and Foster, *Irenaeus*, 89, 91; Behr, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 64–65.

³⁴ Behr, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 64–66.

and there was no distinction between the message, faith, or the tradition of the Church.”³⁵ Therefore, the Scriptures read by church presbyters preserved the authentic tradition of exegesis and transmitted the authentic post-resurrection teachings of Jesus called the “Rule of Faith.”³⁶ This was considered the divine knowledge preserved by the church as it joins the Bible and tradition to faith and life.³⁷ Adherence to this belief precluded a church presbyter, including Irenaeus, from saying anything new about God that was not revealed within this tradition.³⁸ Differences in practice could be tolerated if they did not violate the essential unity of the faith, but Irenaeus would firmly oppose various groups whose teachings violated apostolic doctrine. A teacher without apostolic authentication was a false teacher.³⁹

Influenced by Ignatius’s Example

Passages in Polycarp’s epistle to the Philippians describe the regional context of Christianity in which Irenaeus lived. In chapter 6, Polycarp commands,

And let the presbyters be compassionate and merciful to all, bringing back those that wander, visiting all the sick, and not neglecting the widow the orphan, or the poor, but always “providing for that which is becoming in the sight of God and man;” abstaining from all wrath, respect of persons, and unjust judgment; keeping far off from all covetousness, not quickly crediting [an evil report] against anyone, not severe in judgment, as knowing that we are all under a debt of sin. . . . Let us then serve Him in fear, and with all reverence, even as He himself has commanded us, and as the apostles who preached the Gospel unto us, and the prophets who proclaimed beforehand the coming of the Lord [have taught us]. Let us be zealous in the pursuit of that which is good, keeping ourselves from causes of offense, from false brethren, and from those who in hypocrisy bear the name of the Lord, and draw away vain men into error.⁴⁰

³⁵ Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 86, 149.

³⁶ Irenaeus also referred to this as the Rule of Truth.

³⁷ Donovan, *One Right Reading?*, 126–27; Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 145; Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.11.1–2 (*ANF*, 1:426).

³⁸ Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 31.

³⁹ Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 6; Donovan, *One Right Reading?*, 124.

⁴⁰ Polycarp, *Phil.* 6 (*ANF*, 34).

This command describes the role of elders in restoring error-stricken brethren and a charge to stay apart from false brothers who draw believers into error. It also describes the prophets as preachers of the Lord's coming before the incarnation and confirms the apostles as preachers of the gospel after the Lord's appearing. This demonstrates Polycarp's support of the bi-testamental unity that Irenaeus will later defend.

Polycarp also identified an enemy of the Philippian church to be avoided:

For whosoever does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is antichrist; and whosoever does not confess the testimony of the cross, is of the devil; and whosoever perverts the oracles of the LORD to his own lusts and says that there is neither a resurrection nor a judgment, he is the first-born of Satan. Wherefore, forsaking the vanity of many, and their false doctrines, let us return to the word which has been handed down to us from the beginning; "watching unto prayer," and persevering in fasting; beseeching in our supplications the all-seeing God "not to lead us into temptation," as the LORD has said: "The spirit truly is willing, but the flesh is weak."⁴¹

All of these doctrines are hallmarks of Marcionite Christianity. Consequently, chapters 6 and 7 of Polycarp's epistle explicated his belief that a bishop's role is inclusive of restoring deceived believers and explicitly declare that Marcionite Christianity is an antichristian, Satanic belief system.

The conclusion of Polycarp's epistle indicated it was serving double duty as a cover letter to epistles written by Ignatius of Antioch; Polycarp's church possessed these epistles and sent copies of them to the Philippians.⁴² These seven letters provide vital information about Ignatius's understanding of the bishop, elder, and deacon roles within the church; they also mark and describe the church's enemy, the Docetae. One letter was directed to the congregation at Smyrna and a second specifically to Polycarp as its bishop.

⁴¹ Polycarp, *Phil.* 7 (*ANF*, 34–35).

⁴² Polycarp, *Phil.* 13 (*ANF*, 36).

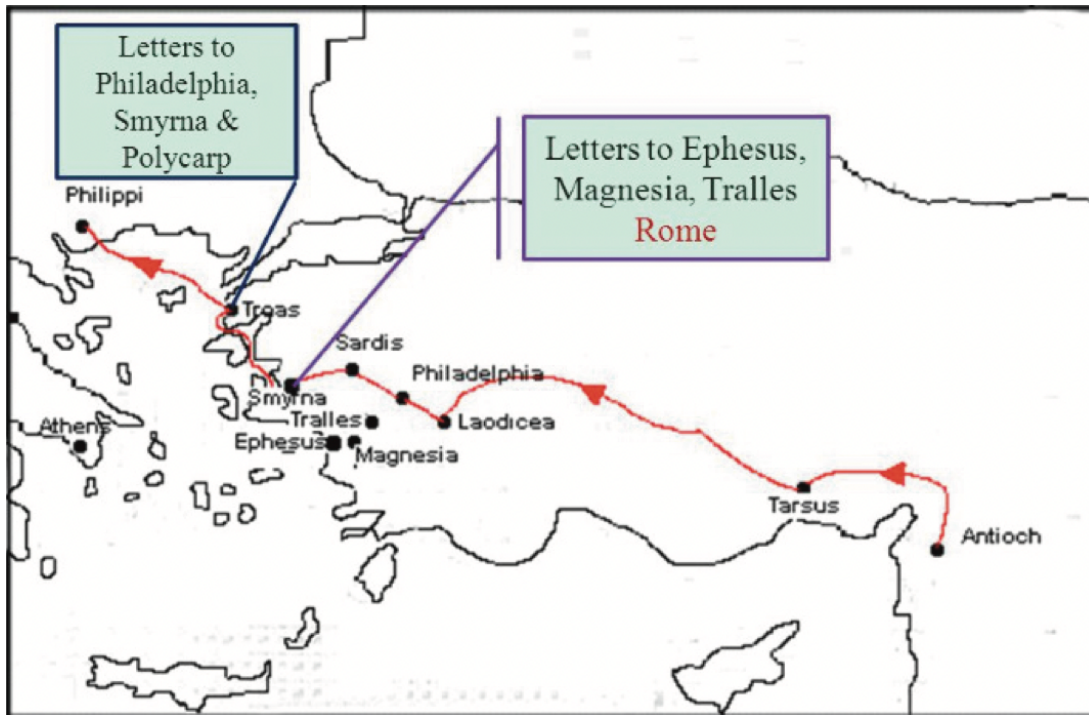


Figure 4: Ignatius's area of influence⁴³

Eusebius testified that “on the death of Evodius, who was the first bishop of Antioch, Ignatius was appointed the second.”⁴⁴ He traveled to Rome as a prisoner one summer, and the journey took him through Philadelphia, where he spent time among their Christians. He also reached Smyrna and stayed there a while before traveling to Troas and on to Philadelphia. He finally reached Rome, where he was martyred.⁴⁵ While in Smyrna, Ignatius wrote letters to Ephesus, Magnesia, Tralles, and Rome; after reaching Troas, he would write letters to Philadelphia, to Smyrna, and to Polycarp.⁴⁶ For Ignatius,

⁴³ Joseph M. Strengholt, “The Seven Epistles of Ignatius,” 1, <http://arnhemnijmegenchaplaincy.nl/resources/study-material/ignatius.pdf>.

⁴⁴ Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.22.1 (Crusé, 85–86).

⁴⁵ Alistair Stewart, trans. “On Ignatius of Antioch,” in Ignatius of Antioch, *The Letters*, Popular Patristics 49 (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2013), 11–12.

⁴⁶ Stewart, “On Ignatius of Antioch,” 12.

a community gathered around its bishop “is a community representing the worship of heaven but is also a community representing the mercies of God to all.”⁴⁷ Alistair Stewart, a translator of Ignatius’s epistles, observes,

The Docetic vision of Christ destroys this, because, as Ignatius sees, these people cannot keep a Eucharist, cannot hold an agape meal in integrity, because they have no true belief in the unity of flesh and spirit in Christ. For this reason, they likewise have no idea of the unity of flesh and spirit sacramentally expressed, as they cannot see the unity of flesh and spirit in people more generally.⁴⁸

The tenets of the incarnation were as vital to Ignatius as they were to Polycarp and explained in part his strong opposition to the Docetists. In his epistle to the Romans, Ignatius called himself the bishop *from* Syria, not the bishop *of* Syria, indicating that he is not a mono-episcopate over the entire region, which Stewart also affirms.⁴⁹ Consequently, Ignatius expected the bishop in office to exercise his authority and oversight to the extent of the congregations within each of these cities.

Writing to Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna,⁵⁰ Ignatius declared, “Do not let those who appear trustworthy and who teach strange doctrines browbeat you. Stand firm as an anvil when it is struck.”⁵¹ This indicates that false teachers were active in the Johannine church of Smyrna. Likewise, Ignatius’s general epistle to the Smyrna Church warns them against docetic false teachers.⁵² He instructs, “You all should give heed to the bishop, so that God may do so to you. I am a ransom for those who are subject to the bishop, the presbyters, deacons.”⁵³ This pattern indicates his understanding of church hierarchy and authority. He also tells the Smyrna Church to “Follow the bishop, all of you, as Jesus

⁴⁷ Stewart, “On Ignatius of Antioch,” 15.

⁴⁸ Stewart, “On Ignatius of Antioch,” 15.

⁴⁹ Ignatius of Antioch, *Rom.* 2 (Stewart, 67, 69); Stewart, “On Ignatius of Antioch,” 11.

⁵⁰ Ignatius of Antioch, *Pol.* 1 (Stewart, 101).

⁵¹ Ignatius, *Pol.* 3 (Stewart, 103).

⁵² Ignatius of Antioch, *Smyrn.* 4–7 (Stewart, 91–93).

⁵³ Ignatius, *Pol.* 6 (Stewart, 103, 105).

Christ the Father, and the presbytery as the apostles. Respect the deacons as the commandments of God. Without the bishop, nobody should do anything relating to the church.”⁵⁴ Polycarp understood and ministered under this church hierarchy, and Irenaeus grew to maturity under its influence.

The Ephesian Church had a bishop named Onesimus.⁵⁵ Ignatius instructed the Ephesians to be “subject to the bishop and to the presbytery, so being hallowed in every way.”⁵⁶ He viewed the hierarchy of the church to be Christ as doing the will of the Father and the bishopric as being likewise obedient to Christ’s will and desires. He declared that the church should operate in accord with the mind of the bishop and stated that the presbyters should be attuned to the bishop like strings on the harp.⁵⁷ Accordingly, he told the church to “be anxious not to oppose the bishop, so that we may be subject to God”⁵⁸ and “look upon the bishop as the LORD himself.”⁵⁹ The Ephesians were mentioned as having false teachers passing by which they refused to hear.⁶⁰ A detailed examination of this letter is not practical in this thesis, however it contains multiple affirmations that indicate Ignatius’s opponents were Docetists, as at Smyrna. Ignatius addresses Polybius, the bishop of the Asian provincial church of Tralles.⁶¹ His introduction depicts his view of church order, with the bishop representing the Father, the presbyters representing the Sanhedrin of God and company of the apostles, and the deacons respected in the same

⁵⁴ Ignatius, *Smyrn.* 8 (Stewart, 93, 95).

⁵⁵ Ignatius of Antioch, *Eph.* 1 (Stewart, 29).

⁵⁶ Ignatius, *Eph.* 2 (Stewart, 29, 31).

⁵⁷ Ignatius, *Eph.* 3–4 (Stewart, 31).

⁵⁸ Ignatius, *Eph.* 5 (Stewart, 31, 33).

⁵⁹ Ignatius, *Eph.* 6 (Stewart, 33).

⁶⁰ Ignatius, *Eph.* 9 (Stewart, 33, 35).

⁶¹ Ignatius of Antioch, *Trall.* 1 (Stewart, 57).

way as Christ was respected.⁶² Ignatius further declares anyone undertaking anything apart from the bishop, presbyters, and deacons is not in pure conscience.⁶³ He calls their opponents, the Docetae, unbelievers and orders true believers to flee from them.⁶⁴

Ignatius praises the Magnesian Church, which also has a hierarchy of bishop, presbyters, and deacons.⁶⁵ Ignatius urges them to do everything

in concord of God, as the bishop is seated first, as representing God and the presbyters as representing the council of the apostles and the deacons, especially dear to me, entrusted with the ministry of Jesus Christ, who was with the Father before the ages and who will appear at the end . . . Be united with the bishop and with those in the first seats, representing the teaching of incorruptibility.⁶⁶

Magnesia had a problem with a group of Judaizers,⁶⁷ Ignatius's answer to combatting them was the unity of the church body and the correct leadership pattern. Further, Ignatius opens his letter to the Philadelphians with the same church hierarchy⁶⁸ before addressing "apparently trustworthy wolves," who are wicked plants; he specifically identifies Judaizers as the congregation's problem.⁶⁹ Ignatius recommended the same hierarchy to every congregation including Polycarp's Smyrna; therefore, this was likely the hierarchy he utilized while in Antioch.

The larger region's demographic and geographic connections provided the ideal environment for Irenaeus to become familiar with the Docetists and Ignatius's form of bishopric; it also provided him geographic connections to two other apostles. Eusebius

⁶² Ignatius, *Trall.* 3 (Stewart, 57, 59).

⁶³ Ignatius, *Trall.* 7 (Stewart, 61).

⁶⁴ Ignatius, *Trall.* 11 (Stewart, 63).

⁶⁵ Ignatius of Antioch, *Magn.* 2–3 (Stewart, 45).

⁶⁶ Ignatius, *Magn.* 6 (Stewart, 47).

⁶⁷ Ignatius, *Magn.* 8–11 (Stewart, 49, 51).

⁶⁸ Ignatius of Antioch, *Phld.* 1 (Stewart, 79); cf. Ignatius, *Phld.* 4, 7 (Stewart, 81, 83).

⁶⁹ Ignatius, *Phld.* 6 (Stewart, 82).

records that Andrew went to Scythia, while John went to Asia.⁷⁰ Church historical tradition indicates that Andrew spent time at Ephesus in Asia Minor; according to a revelation given by Andrew, this is where John wrote his Gospel.⁷¹ Likewise, McBirnie records the affirmation of Jean Danielou that “Papias had written some of the *Expositions of the Oracles of the Lord* in which he had collected traditions about the Apostles from people who had known them, and he tells us, in particular, that he has heard the daughters of the Apostle Philip speaking in Hierapolis: so we can believe as certain the information he gives us that the Apostle Philip lived in Hierapolis.”⁷² McBirnie also refers to the synodal letter of Polycrates, dated circa AD 194, written against Bishop Victor of Rome. This letter declares that “Philip, one of the twelve apostles, sleeps at Hierapolis.”⁷³ The connection with Philip provides apostolic roots to Papias, who is mentioned by Irenaeus in *Haer.* 5.33.4 and whose surviving fragments contain material substantiating Irenaeus’s defense of Christianity against the twin-sided threat of Marcion and Valentinus.

The territory had multiple apostolic connections and was saturated with apostolic writings. It also benefited from the personal teaching and writing of Ignatius and Polycarp. Irenaeus had sufficient teaching and material at his disposal to defend what would be termed Catholic Christianity against its various opponents.

Rise to the Bishopric

Irenaeus’s home church in Smyrna was associated with churches in southern Gaul, and Irenaeus eventually moved to Lyons and became a leader in its Christian

⁷⁰ Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.1.1 (Crusé, 67).

⁷¹ McBirnie, *The Search for the Twelve Apostles*, 51.

⁷² McBirnie, *The Search for the Twelve Apostles*, 96. McBirnie notes, “The Montanist Proclus declared that it was not the Apostle Philip but the deacon of the same name, the person described in the Acts as having stayed in Caesarea, whose four daughters remained virgins and uttered prophecies. (HE III.31.4). But Polycrates of Ephesus at the end of the second century, confirms what Papias says, and it is certainly the Apostle Philip who died at Hierapolis.”

⁷³ McBirnie, *The Search for the Twelve Apostles*, 101.

community. There, he engaged in written defense of the church's teachings, as the *Pax Romana* had encouraged people to travel the empire's roads and oceans without fear, enabling Christianity—and its rivals—to spread.⁷⁴ The church at Lyon was founded mid-second century and was originally a community of Greek and Greek-speaking members, Romans, and Celts. They shared a close relationship with the churches of Vienne. Despite connections to Rome and Asia Minor, Lyons was Gaul's regional hub.⁷⁵ Like Rome's churches, Lyon's community was beset by internal division caused by rival faith groups, loosely termed gnostics.⁷⁶ What initially brought Irenaeus to Lyon is unknown. During the persecutions that broke out circa AD 177, mob violence caused the rounding up and execution of Christians by the provincial government. The church's leader, Pothinus, who was over ninety years old, was martyred, and Irenaeus became the community's leader.⁷⁷

Following the persecutions and his elevation to bishop, Irenaeus gained greater prominence when he countered the rise of the Montanists, or the New Prophecy Movement, whose influence was disrupting the Roman churches and his own bishopric.⁷⁸ Irenaeus had been known as a peacemaker. In the AD 180s, he had promoted peace and tolerance between Asian bishops who celebrated the crucifixion on the Jewish Passover and the Roman Bishop Victor who was trying to excommunicate them. In the current controversy, Irenaeus chose to confront not only the Montanists, but also the Valentinians, Ebionites, and Marcionites.⁷⁹ This begs the question: why did he refuse to

⁷⁴ Donovan, *One Right Reading?*, 8–9.

⁷⁵ Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 2–3; Parvis, “Who Was Irenaeus?,” 15.

⁷⁶ Parvis, “Who Was Irenaeus?,” 16.

⁷⁷ Before Pothinus's martyrdom, Irenaeus was dispatched by the community's confessors to Bishop Eleutherus in Rome. Though Pothinus and later Irenaeus had been referred to as the bishops of their community, Irenaeus's introduction to Eleutherus shows that the role of presbyters in Lyons and Rome served different functions. Parvis, “Who Was Irenaeus?,” 15; Donovan, *One Right Reading?*, 9; Behr, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 17, 21; Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 4.

⁷⁸ Behr, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 16; Parvis, “Who Was Irenaeus?,” 22–23.

⁷⁹ Parvis, “Who Was Irenaeus?,” 22–23.

tolerate these groups while he helped to make peace for another group that celebrated the crucifixion on Passover? The answer would be found within his writings.

II: Literary Contributions

Bart Ehrman, author of *Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew*, views both the gnostics and Marcionites as lost forms of Christianity for two reasons. First, most of their writings were destroyed and their teachings forgotten until recent discoveries of various texts attributed to them enabled modern scholars to study them. Second, they literally lost the battle to be considered proto-orthodox thanks to the implementation of apostolic succession, the Rule of Faith, and the (then) extant biblical canon.⁸⁰ Irenaeus played a vital role in developing the scaffolding of apostolic succession and the Rule of Faith; his surviving writings define what he considered the true scriptural canon and helped explain what became orthodox Christianity. All Irenaeus's surviving writings originate within the last two decades of the second century and depict his struggle to defend the authentic interpretation of Christianity's true faith, using the double-edged sword of interpretation to defend that faith.⁸¹ His writings indicate an allowance of two levels of textual meaning, and he focuses his objections on interpretations contrary to the Rule of Faith and those propagating those faulty interpretations, who, he maintains, have no right to interpret Scripture.⁸²

The Demonstration of Apostolic Preaching

His work, *The Demonstration of Apostolic Preaching*, presents both Christ, and subsequently Christianity, as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy that

⁸⁰ Brakke, *The Gnostics*, 7–8.

⁸¹ Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 1; Donovan, *One Right Reading?*, 4.

⁸² Donovan, *One Right Reading?*, 4, 120.

structures salvation according to God's covenants with humanity.⁸³ John Behr notes that Irenaeus refers the reader of this work to *Against Heresies*, which would "seem to indicate that the *Demonstration* was written later, at the end of the second century, although it is possible that the final chapters of the *Demonstration* are a later addition."⁸⁴ Irenaeus's work was designed to be a handbook for a man named Marcianus to "understand all the members of the body of truth," and its design is neither polemic nor apologetic.⁸⁵ Behr cites its importance because it is the work of a bishop who claimed direct knowledge from those taught by the apostles themselves and because it describes the apostles' teachings. He describes it as a "catechetical treatise" that defines "Christianity as it was then expounded by a bishop to his flock" and declares its value to be beyond estimation.⁸⁶ Irenaeus' methodology is observed to be like that of the Acts speeches, recounting the culmination of God's deeds in the Son and the subsequent sending of the Holy Spirit. His defense does not use any New Testament writings but instead draws its entire content from the Old Testament. This is said to demonstrate a recognition of the ultimate authority of the apostles' preaching.⁸⁷ Notably, Behr observes:

That the apostolic preaching is nothing other than the various predictions made by the prophets, proclaimed as having been realized in Jesus Christ, means that, on the one hand, the apostolic preaching is both the key to understanding the Old Testament and the confirmation of its fulfillment, while, on the other hand, it is the Old Testament which shapes the whole of the Christian Revelation itself.⁸⁸

It is this understanding which makes Irenaeus, through his apostolic heritage, the perfectly equipped individual to refute Marcionite Christianity.

⁸³ Ferguson, "Irenaeus," 616.

⁸⁴ John Behr, trans., "St. Irenaeus of Lyons," in St. Irenaeus of Lyons, *On the Apostolic Preaching* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997), 3.

⁸⁵ Behr, "St. Irenaeus of Lyons," 7.

⁸⁶ Behr, "St. Irenaeus of Lyons," 7.

⁸⁷ Behr, "St. Irenaeus of Lyons," 8.

⁸⁸ Behr, "St. Irenaeus of Lyons," 13.

Against Heresies

This five-volume work opposed multiple groups, including gnostics, that held that all matter was evil and demanded a distinction between the Creator and the Supreme God.⁸⁹ Gnostic teachings challenged Irenaeus's role as bishop, requiring him to rebut their interpretation of Scripture with the Rule of Faith as the proper interpreter of creation, redemption, and human nature.⁹⁰ Irenaeus' writings provide vital information about the various gnostic teachers whose writings he diligently studied and ultimately regarded as false, including Ptolemais, Valentinus, and Marcus.⁹¹ He ably demonstrated to his readers why the theological assumptions of these opponents contradicted the Rule of Faith.⁹² One dispute involved various gnostic groups that believed Irenaeus and his community wrongly worshipped the inferior, limited Creator God because they did not follow the gnostic interpretation of Scripture.⁹³ Each of these groups believed their view legitimate, but Irenaeus rejected their arguments as contradicting the Rule of Faith. Their arguments were based on a larger collection of texts than Irenaeus's community accepted;⁹⁴ in fact, these groups were different manifestations of a single error called false gnosis, first propagated by Simon Magus.⁹⁵ The gnostic groups continually changed their texts and interpretations; this stood in contrast to the Christian bishops who faithfully preserved and handed down the original teachings of Jesus. To Irenaeus, this was proof of the importance of apostolic succession in challenging ever-changing,

⁸⁹ Donovan, *One Right Reading?*, 26; Ferguson, "Irenaeus," 616.

⁹⁰ Ferguson, "Irenaeus," 616; Donovan, *One Right Reading?*, 33.

⁹¹ Behr, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 20.

⁹² Donovan, *One Right Reading?*, 36.

⁹³ Michael Slusser, "The Heart of Irenaeus's Theology," in Parvis and Foster, *Irenaeus*, 133; Donovan, *One Right Reading?*, 39–40.

⁹⁴ Donovan, *One Right Reading?*, 39–40, 148, 172.

⁹⁵ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.23.2 (*ANF*, 1:348); Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.27.1 (*ANF*, 1:352).

unauthorized teaching.⁹⁶ In addition to his refutation of the gnostics, Eusebius mentions that Irenaeus composed epistles in opposition to various schismatics at Rome: one epistle to Blastus and two to Florinus.⁹⁷ Although lost, these writings further demonstrate Irenaeus's efforts in combatting the heresies that beset the Roman church.

III: Hermeneutical Legacy

According to Behr, the differences between Irenaeus and his opponents were fundamentally hermeneutical.⁹⁸ Second-century Greeks, Jews, Christians, and gnostics called God "Father," as did Irenaeus's opponents. However, the Greek concept of a Father was a cosmic genealogical one, whereas Judaism and Christianity viewed the Father as electing and caring for his children.⁹⁹ The gnostic Father was great but unloving; his offspring were born in ignorance, and he thereby enabled all evil. The Marcionite Father was strictly unknown before Jesus came and could not be the same as the Creator.¹⁰⁰ However, Irenaeus maintained that God was simultaneously the Old Testament's Creator God and Christ's Father. Moreover, Irenaeus utilized other philosophical and contemporary ideas to depict God as the indescribable being who alone is divinely transcendent.¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ Brakke, *The Gnostics*, 4; Donovan, *One Right Reading?*, 43.

⁹⁷ See Irenaeus, *Haer.* 5.20.1 (*ANF* 1:547–48), "One was addressed to Blastus, On Schism; one to Florinus, On Sovereignty, or on the truth that God is not the author of evil, for the latter appeared to maintain this opinion. Since he was again on the point of being carried away by the Valentinian delusion, Irenaeus also wrote the treatise on the Ogdoad, or the number eight, in which book he also showed that he was the first who received the original succession from the apostles."

⁹⁸ Behr, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 123.

⁹⁹ Peter Widdicombe, "Irenaeus and the Knowledge of God as Father: Text and Context," in Parvis and Foster, *Irenaeus*, 141.

¹⁰⁰ Slusser, "The Heart of Irenaeus's Theology," 139; Widdicombe, "Irenaeus and the Knowledge of God as Father," 144.

¹⁰¹ Widdicombe, "Irenaeus and the Knowledge of God as Father," 141–42.

Theology

Irenaeus declared that God held all things together while God himself was uncontained; he propagated the Judeo-Christian declaration that God alone is the sole cause of all existence and created through his will and Word. This God stood in contrast to the innumerable creators and gods of his opponents, whose finite natures rendered them contained within something greater than themselves.¹⁰² Additionally, Irenaeus proclaimed that God is simple (without parts), and all of God's essence is simultaneously the same: intellect, spirit, thought, word, hearing, eye, light, etc. He is the source of all good things; when he wills, it is simultaneously thought, spoken, and acted upon by God's own substance, without external aid.¹⁰³ While opposing groups depict God as unknowable, Irenaeus alone depicts God as bridging the chasm of divine unknowability and relating to his creatures.¹⁰⁴ He posits that the Creator God is knowable, not because he is an inferior being, but because his love compels him to be known by his creation. This is accomplished through the Word made flesh and the Spirit of wisdom he gives to humanity through his divine love.¹⁰⁵ Osborn notes, "This argument refuted the Gnostic-Marcionite accusation that the Creator was inferior to the supreme God while declaring that the supreme God was judicially righteous, and good, as he created all things by his Word."¹⁰⁶

Though Irenaeus believed in strengthening peace by permitting disagreement on issues that were not matters of faith, he could not allow his opponents to be evil interpreters of Scripture, wrongly use the Scriptures, and garble the message of the

¹⁰² Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 51–52; Slusser, "The Heart of Irenaeus's Theology," 137.

¹⁰³ Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 38, 73; Widdicombe, "Irenaeus and the Knowledge of God as Father," 142.

¹⁰⁴ Slusser, "The Heart of Irenaeus's Theology," 134.

¹⁰⁵ Slusser, "The Heart of Irenaeus's Theology," 137, 139.

¹⁰⁶ Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 54.

prophets.¹⁰⁷ This prompted Irenaeus to stress the presence of the Word made flesh, Jesus, with his creation. This enabled humanity to see Jesus's suffering and understand the plan through which God saved humanity.¹⁰⁸ Irenaeus refuted Marcionite claims that Jesus's message was from an unknown God by showing that the Son makes the Father visible; the Son is the manifestation of an already known God.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, Irenaeus promoted the unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, depicting one God using two hands—the Son as his Word and the Spirit of Wisdom—to accomplish his own ends.¹¹⁰

Philosophy

By Irenaeus's lifetime, the church had used the Rule of Faith's mechanisms to transform the Jewish Scriptures to read as a witness of Christ.¹¹¹ Concerning the LXX translation, Irenaeus believed the narrative: Ptolemy II sought seventy elders of the Jews, separated them before they could conspire to hide any proper interpretations, and then had them all translate their holy books. All seventy translations were identical, thereby demonstrating the divine origin of their writings.¹¹² However, the use of pre-Christian Scripture was little help against those denying the Creator. Middle Platonic philosophy was prominent in Irenaeus's time, and following Justin Martyr's lead, Irenaeus viewed God's prophetic images as truths that were erroneously called Platonic forms. Osborn notes, "Irenaeus was not aware of the Platonic pattern in his thoughts. He did not acknowledge the authority of any specific philosopher; however, the Platonic pattern was the way most minds of his time period functioned and communicated. . . . Likewise a

¹⁰⁷ Donovan, *One Right Reading?*, 57; Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 5; Behr, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 2–3.

¹⁰⁸ Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 91, 113.

¹⁰⁹ Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 112.

¹¹⁰ Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 89–91.

¹¹¹ Donovan, *One Right Reading?*, 14.

¹¹² Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.8.1 (Crusé, 165).

similar pattern is present in contemporaries such as Origen, Tertullian, Celsus, and Marcus Aurelius.” These abstract images, manifestations of God’s own mind, along with their Platonic epistemology, became actualized in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ.¹¹³ Irenaeus believe the Platonic God who was both an omnipresent consciousness and Creation’s wise architect was, in actuality, the king whose two hands, Word and Wisdom, created all things and was himself the proclaimer of creation, law, redemption, and gospel.¹¹⁴

Continuity

Marcion’s theological ditheism made it impossible for the God of the Law and the Prophets to be the God of Jesus Christ. His *Evangelion* and *Apostolikon* utilized a de-Judaizing polemic against those who used the Jewish Scriptures to identify Jesus with the Old Testament God.¹¹⁵ This prompted Irenaeus’ efforts to establish continuity between both Old and New Testaments, making him the earliest known author to argue from Scripture as a whole. Using Peter’s sermon (Acts 2) and the witnesses of Stephen (Acts 7) and Philip (Acts 8) that affirmed the Jewish God as the Christian God, Irenaeus united both Testaments through the proclamation that one God consistently worked for one goal: human salvation.¹¹⁶ He would go on to devote nineteen chapters of his fourth book of *Against Heresies* to demonstrating that Christ proclaimed one God Creator and Lord of all, existing independent of Creation, and uncontained by it—unlike the God of the gnostics and Marcion.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 15, 31, 163, 169–70.

¹¹⁴ Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 194, 236.

¹¹⁵ David E. Wilhite, “Is Jesus YHWH? Two De-Judaizing Trajectories of Marcion and Justin,” *Forum* 9, no. 1 (2020): 39.

¹¹⁶ Donovan, *One Right Reading?*, 75, 119.

¹¹⁷ Donovan, *One Right Reading?*, 99–100.

Irenaeus's fundamental assumption was that *one* God acted in continuity from creation, through prophecy, to the incarnation of Jesus Christ.¹¹⁸ In refuting Marcion's claim that he possessed the original gospel, Irenaeus had to demonstrate that the Scriptures his community used were the correct canon and indeed were made up of two Testaments.¹¹⁹ Instead of Marcion's belief that Judaism and the Jewish Scriptures were an obstacle to faith in Christ, Irenaeus needed to demonstrate that both Testaments were a unified whole that pointed humanity towards faith in Christ.¹²⁰

Christology

Marcionites alleged that the Old Testament prophets spoke by the power of a god other than the one revealed in the New Testament by Jesus Christ. In response, Irenaeus challenged them to read the apostolic Gospels describing the life, teaching, and sufferings of the Lord, then read the prophets and discover that the Lord's life was accurately prophesied.¹²¹ Irenaeus debunked allegations that the Lord fulfilled the prophecies by chance; the prophecies, particularly those of suffering, were specific in nature and not similar to those experienced by the prophets. Furthermore, had the prophecies been fulfilled by a person prior to Christ, this would have been recorded.¹²² The same prophets predicted the virgin conception and birth of the Messiah who would heal the sick and raise the dead.¹²³ They predicted his triumphal entry, betrayal, torture, crucifixion, death, resurrection, and exaltation to God's right hand.¹²⁴ Irenaeus concluded

¹¹⁸ Donovan, *One Right Reading?*, 80, 88.

¹¹⁹ Behr, *Irenaeus of Lyons*, 207.

¹²⁰ Gabriel Ernesto Andrade, "Marcion of Synope's Relevance in the Contemporary World Vis-à-Vis Religious Violence," *Acta Theologica* 38, no. 2 (2018): 20.

¹²¹ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.34.1 (*ANF*, 1:511).

¹²² Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.34.3 (*ANF*, 1:511–12).

¹²³ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.33.11 (*ANF*, 1:509–10).

¹²⁴ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.33.12–13 (*ANF*, 1:510).

these and many other Old Testament proofs by demonstrating that the prophets predicted a new covenant fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as rivers of water.¹²⁵ Irenaeus believed that the truly spiritual (i.e., those attending apostolic churches) would read Old Testament prophecy and come to the same conclusions; any other interpretation would be blasphemy against what God had revealed in both Testaments through his prophets and through his Son.¹²⁶ Marcion's rejection of this interpretation defined him as a blasphemer; his excommunication by his father and the Roman Church signified his lack of authority to propagate his doctrines. Irenaeus concluded by stating that his arguments exist for the purpose of preventing Marcionites from committing "great blasphemy, and from insanely fabricating a multitude of gods."¹²⁷

Marcionites alleged that the Old Testament prophets were ignorant of the Father; however, the prophets' predictions of Christ's words, works, sufferings, and new covenant indicate they truly knew and served the Father.¹²⁸ Irenaeus proved that the servants predicted and announced their king's coming, and the incarnation is the king's arrival amongst his subjects.¹²⁹ The only proper interpretation was that the king came to his subjects and let them rejoice in his presence, teaching, and gifts; it is wrong to ask what else the king brought besides his presence.¹³⁰ If the prophecies had not been fulfilled in Christ, then the Marcionites would have had a valid claim. However, Jesus declared that he came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets (Matt 5:17–18); further, the apostle Paul confessed that the Law and Prophets bear witness to the righteousness of

¹²⁵ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.33.14 (*ANF*, 1:510–11).

¹²⁶ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.33.15 (*ANF*, 1:511).

¹²⁷ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.34.5 (*ANF*, 1:512–13).

¹²⁸ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.34.3 (*ANF*, 1:511–12).

¹²⁹ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.34.1 (*ANF*, 1:511).

¹³⁰ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.34.1 (*ANF*, 1:511).

God fulfilled in Christ (Rom 3:21), and the just shall live by faith (Rom 1:17; cf. Hab 2:4). This demonstrated the oneness of God that both the prophets and the Lord Jesus declared.¹³¹

Irenaeus used the parable of the treasure in the field to declare Christ as the treasure of Scripture prefigured in types and parables; consequently, a Christocentric reading of the Old Testament would find the foreshadowing of Christ throughout.¹³² Citing Daniel 12:4 and Jeremiah 23:20, Irenaeus declared that prophecies are enigmatic until fulfilled, and then become clearly understood. Therefore, the Jews read the law like a fable because they lacked its interpretive key: the incarnation of God's Son, his life, death, and resurrection. Christians read the law correctly because they had Christ.¹³³

Irenaeus provided numerous examples of Christocentric interpretation. Abraham prefigured both covenants since he was justified by faith while uncircumcised and later received the covenant of circumcision; he contained both covenants within himself to be the father to all God's followers. Everyone gathered into Abraham is built upon Christ, the chief cornerstone, as part of God's building.¹³⁴ Another example was that of Judah's wife, Tamar, and her twin sons. At birth, the first son, Zara [*sic*] stuck out his hand, which was marked with a scarlet cord by a midwife. He withdrew his hand, and his brother, Perez, emerged from the womb first. Irenaeus interpreted that Zara was the circumcised covenant born second, although he was the elder, so that others could be born, hence the two covenant peoples, Jew and Gentile.¹³⁵ Irenaeus also interpreted Exodus 3:14 to be the pre-incarnate Son, coupling it with Isaiah 43:10 to demonstrate the

¹³¹ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.34.2 (*ANF*, 1:511).

¹³² Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.26.1 (*ANF*, 1:496–97).

¹³³ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.26.1 (*ANF*, 1:496–97).

¹³⁴ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.25.1 (*ANF*, 1:495–96).

¹³⁵ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.25.2 (*ANF*, 1:496).

presence of both Father and Son manifesting themselves as Israel's one true God.¹³⁶ These examples were prooftexts that *one* God showed the patriarchs and prophets the paternal and legal prefigurings of Christ. Irenaeus likened these texts to seeds that the sovereign God sowed throughout the Old Testament to harvest in the New (John 4:37; 1 Cor 3:7).¹³⁷

Irenaeus depicted the Old Testament's many covenants as progressive revelation—similar to how a human king would issue new edicts granting his subjects greater freedoms and abilities—and declared that such a pattern was evident in the New Testament. Irenaeus cited Matthew 12:6, Jesus's declaration that he is greater than the temple, as an example: Jesus's revelation is that he is of the same substance as the temple and yet even greater in status, for one cannot be greater than something if he has nothing in common with it.¹³⁸ In Matthew 15:3–4, Jesus claims the Old Testament God as his own Father and condemns the Pharisees for creating traditions that violate God's law.¹³⁹ He says that to love God is the greatest commandment, loving one's neighbor is the second greatest commandment, and all the Law and Prophets hang upon these (Matt 22:37–40). In Matthew 19, Jesus quotes several lines of the Decalogue to the rich ruler who asks what he must do to inherit eternal life; he consistently demonstrates that he is of the same mind as God his Father.¹⁴⁰ With these statements, Jesus clearly identifies his Father as the God of the Law and Prophets. These commands are a continuation of the commandments given to Yahweh's followers, and they also reveal that the greater One has come to fulfill the Law and the Prophets.¹⁴¹

¹³⁶ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.6.2 (*ANF*, 1:419).

¹³⁷ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.25.3 (*ANF*, 1:496).

¹³⁸ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.9.2 (*ANF*, 1:472).

¹³⁹ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.9.3 (*ANF*, 1:472–73); Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.12.1 (*ANF*, 1:475).

¹⁴⁰ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.12.4–5 (*ANF*, 1:476–77).

¹⁴¹ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.12.2–3 (*ANF*, 1:475–76).

Interpretive Tools

Irenaeus focused on demonstrating that all four Gospels prove that the Old Testament God is the Creator of everything and the Father of Jesus, as foreshadowed and foretold in the Law and the Prophets.¹⁴² He also utilized the double-edged sword of allegorical interpretation to prove the necessity of a four-Gospel New Testament. This proved controversial, as there were debates over which passages were literal and which were allegorical.¹⁴³ Nevertheless, Irenaeus pointed to the examples of the four winds, the four divisions of the world, and the four faces of the Cherubim to substantiate using a four-fold Gospel,¹⁴⁴ in contrast to Marcion's single Gospel (a highly-redacted Luke).¹⁴⁵

Irenaeus' recognition of the four Gospels was based on his recognition of Papias as a reliable source of knowledge because Papias was "the hearer of John, and a companion of Polycarp."¹⁴⁶ Papias's connection to Irenaeus's mentor provided further evidence of his knowledge that the Gospels of Mark and Matthew possessed apostolic connections.¹⁴⁷ Irenaeus's own relationship with Polycarp cemented his knowledge of John's apostolic writings. Additionally, Irenaeus's citation of Luke's connection to Paul in Book 3,¹⁴⁸ coupled with his lack of any presbyterial knowledge of any other Gospels written by the apostles or their companions, further cemented his determination that there were only four authentic Gospels.

Summary

Both Marcion and Irenaeus were born in Anatolia (modern-day Turkey),

¹⁴² Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.9–11 (*ANF*, 1:422–29), with particular emphasis on bk. 3, chap. 11, v. 7.

¹⁴³ Andrade, "Marcion of Synope's Relevance," 27.

¹⁴⁴ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.11.8 (*ANF*, 1:428–29).

¹⁴⁵ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.11.7 (*ANF*, 1:428).

¹⁴⁶ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 5.33–34 (*ANF*, 1:562–65).

¹⁴⁷ Papias, *Fragments* 6 (*ANF*, 1:154).

¹⁴⁸ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.14 (*ANF*, 1:437–38).

Marcion in the province of Pontus and Irenaeus in the province of Asia. Both Marcion and Irenaeus grew up in Christian communities that confronted heresy. While Marcion was twice excommunicated for propagating teachings contrary to the church beliefs, Irenaeus would become both a propagator and defender of the beliefs Marcion had rejected. Irenaeus would defend the use of the Old Testament as Holy Scripture and demonstrate why the Roman church was right and Marcion should be rejected as a heretic.

CHAPTER 4
IRENÆUS’S ARGUMENTS ON BEHALF
OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

As their name suggested, the Catholic Church claimed universal witness according to the entirety of apostolic teaching, unlike the Marcionites, who claimed a mono-apostolic Pauline foundation. This separated Catholic Christianity from heretical sects and churches that rejected all apostolic origins and taught “secret” traditions in their desire to gain followers.¹ The Catholic Church possessed the same books as the synagogue when it proclaimed its two covenants since the New Testament canon did not yet have an establish canon or doctrine.² This set the stage for the interpretive war between Marcionite Christianity and Catholic Christianity. Marcion’s incorporation of Cerdon’s teachings into his own de-Judaized theology helps explain his opposition to the LXX and the Roman Church’s decision to utilize it as part of the canon. Marcion and his followers lived over a large span of time and geography; they were part of the most significant debates in second-century Christianity.³ The Marcionites were considered the greatest danger to second-century Catholic Christianity in Italy, Egypt, Eastern Syria (Mesopotamia), and Armenia, where Marcionite Christianity was not suppressed until fourth-century Christian emperors sided with the Catholic Church against the

¹ Justo L. González, *The Story of Christianity*, vol. 1, *The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1984), 66.

² Adolf von Harnack, *Marcion: The Gospel of the Alien God*, trans. John E. Steeley and Lyle D. Bierma (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007), 129.

³ Judith M. Lieu, *Marcion and the Making of a Heretic: God and Scripture in the Second Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 323.

Marcionites.⁴

Marcion considered anything legal in religion to be a perversion, and he desired to free Christianity from the Old Testament texts that the Catholic Church sought to preserve.⁵ Marcion biographer Adolf Harnack believed the Church retained the Old Testament for history's sake since both Jesus and Paul stood upon its soil; since this was a fact of geography that Marcion could not dispute, Marcion declared the Church's other positions on the Old Testament falsified.⁶ His purpose was to convince Christendom of the Church's error in embracing false apostles, Jewish evangelists, and the belief that the gospel was an integral part of the Old Testament instead of something entirely new.⁷

Marcionite Christianity held that basic Christianity followed the Pauline teaching that the old order of religion belonging to the Jewish God had been abolished, its documents were no longer divine, and Christians should no longer abide by them.⁸ In opposing Marcion and his false gospel, Irenaeus established the Catholic Church's soteriological doctrines and developed biblical teachings about the goodness and righteousness of the Creator-Redeemer God.⁹ This chapter will examine the cornerstones of Irenaeus-defined Catholic Christianity, which demonstrated its own validity while delegitimizing its Marcionite competitors.

I: The Basis of the Irenaeus's Argument

Irenaeus's opposition to Marcionite Christianity began with the Marcionite denial of the beliefs considered orthodox by the worldwide Catholic Church—the faith as

⁴ Kurt Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism*, trans. and ed. Robert McLachlan Wilson (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995), 317.

⁵ Harnack, *Marcion*, 133.

⁶ Harnack, *Marcion*, 133.

⁷ Harnack, *Marcion*, 123.

⁸ Harnack, *Marcion*, 124–25.

⁹ Harnack, *Marcion*, 131.

originally taught by the apostles and their own disciples.¹⁰ Irenaeus declared that, despite its dispersion across the known world, the church holds and preserves one message because it is “one soul, heart, mouth, hands, and harmonious body.”¹¹ Its declaration is as follows:

She believes in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth and the seas, and all things that are in them; and in one Christ Jesus, the Son of God, who became incarnate for our salvation; and in the Holy Spirit, who proclaimed through the prophets the dispensations of God, and the advents, and the birth from a virgin, and the passion, and the resurrection from the dead and the ascension into heaven in the flesh of the beloved Christ Jesus, our Lord, and his future manifestation from Heaven in the glory of the Father “to gather all things in one,” and to raise up anew all flesh of the whole human race, in order that to Christ Jesus, our Lord, and God, and Savior, and King, according to the will of the invisible father, “every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in the earth, and things under the earth, and that every tongue should confess” to him, and that he should execute just judgment towards all; that he may send “spiritual wickedness,” and the angels who transgressed and became apostates, together with the ungodly, and unrighteous, and wicked, and profane among men, into everlasting fire; but may in the exercise of his grace, confer immortality on the righteous and holy, and those who have kept his commandments and have persevered in his love; some from the beginning of the Christian course, and others from the date of their repentance and may surround them with everlasting glory.¹²

These were the definitive teachings of what Irenaeus called the Catholic Church.¹³ The rulers of the church, no matter how endowed or lacking in individual abilities, were said to universally proclaim this message and tradition and ensure that no one altered it.¹⁴ Irenaeus further insisted that the only differences amongst the church’s teachers were their abilities to address issues in detail and clarity, including:

1. The apostasy of the transgressing angels
2. God’s creation of temporal and eternal things

¹⁰ Irenaeus of Lyons, *Haer.* 1.10.1 (*ANF*, 1:330–31).

¹¹ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.10.2–3 (*ANF*, 1:331–32).

¹² Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.10.1 (*ANF*, 1:330–31).

¹³ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.10.3 (*ANF*, 1:331–32).

¹⁴ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.10.2–3 (*ANF*, 1:331–32).

3. The creation of earthly and heavenly things
4. Why the invisible God manifested himself in different forms to the various prophets
5. Why God gave multiple covenants to demonstrate his character
6. The timing of the incarnation of Christ and his suffering, i.e., why was it not earlier or later?
7. The Gentiles becoming heirs of salvation.
8. The resurrection, whereby the corruptible put on incorruption and mortality put on immortality.¹⁵

Irenaeus based his arguments in the church's historical affirmation of a faith based upon the Old Testament, its God, and the incarnation of the Son who fulfilled the Law and the Prophets. In affirming this creed, Irenaeus deployed a theological argument to delegitimize Marcion's God before contrasting Marcion's contemporary theology with the apostolic theology of the Catholic Church.

II: The Theological Argument

Irenaeus defined God as necessarily containing everything himself while simultaneously being an existentially and spatially unlimited (uncontained) being. He declared it intellectually inconsistent to suggest this infinite God exists but is not the Creator of everything.¹⁶ In contrast, Marcion's two gods were existentially limited beings, separated by infinite distance, and contained within an area larger than themselves. Consequently, Marcion's gods could not be truly God. Irenaeus remarked that either the vacuum itself is God, or no god exists in Marcionite theology.¹⁷

Irenaeus pointed out that other heretics acknowledged that only one God could be the Creator of all things. The Bible calls God the Creator, Jesus the Son calls the Creator God his Father, the prophets call the Creator of Heaven and Earth God and Lord,

¹⁵ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.10.3 (*ANF*, 1:331).

¹⁶ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 2.1.2–4 (*ANF*, 1:359–60).

¹⁷ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 2.4.1 (*ANF*, 1:363).

and this tradition continued with the apostles.¹⁸ Marcion's concept of two gods stood in opposition to both heretical and orthodox groups.

Marcion's Unknown God possessed neither witness nor proofs of his existence.¹⁹ Irenaeus contrasted this with the Catholic Church's God, who needs nothing and no one, who created all things by his Word (Gen 1:1; John 1:3),²⁰ and who never wearies.²¹ Irenaeus also cited the apostle Paul's declaration that this God created all things through the Word and is the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ.²² Irenaeus depicted God the Father using two hands to create everything: the Word of God (the Son) and the wisdom of God (the Holy Spirit).²³ He cited Malachi 2:10, Ephesians 4:6, Matthew 11:27, Revelation 3:7, and Colossians 1:18 to prove this God was Jesus's Father, who gave all things freely to the Son who created all things for his Father.²⁴ Irenaeus offered Proverbs 3:19–20 and 8:27–31 as proof that just as the Son preceded all creation and forever dwells with the Father, so too does Wisdom (the Holy Spirit).²⁵ These three persons are the one God which created all things.²⁶ From the beginning, the Son's purpose was to declare the Father, and the Spirit's role was to inspire the prophets with visions and utterances of the future when the Son would become the manifest image of

¹⁸ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 2.9.1 (*ANF*, 1:369).

¹⁹ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 2.9.2 (*ANF*, 1:369).

²⁰ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 2.2.5 (*ANF*, 1:361–62).

²¹ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 2.2.4 (*ANF*, 1:361).

²² Irenaeus, *Haer.* 2.2.5 (*ANF*, 1:361–62).

²³ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.20.1 (*ANF*, 1:487–88).

²⁴ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.20.2 (*ANF*, 1:488); Irenaeus of Lyons, *Epid.* 4–8 (Behr, 42–45). Irenaeus instructs Marcianus in the truth of the statements he defends in *Against Heresies*.

²⁵ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.20.3 (*ANF*, 1:488); Irenaeus, *Epid.* 43 (Behr, 68).

²⁶ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.20.4 (*ANF*, 1:488).

the invisible God, making visible the character, attributes, and actions of his Father in heaven.²⁷

The Catholic Church's confession about this God was established in what Irenaeus dubbed the Rule of Truth:

The rule of truth which we hold, is, that there is one God Almighty, who made all things by His Word, and fashioned and formed, out of that which had no existence, all things which exist. Thus says the Scripture, to that effect By the Word of the Lord were the heavens established, and all the might of them, by the spirit of His mouth. And again, all things were made by Him, and without Him was nothing made. There is no exception or deduction stated, but the Father made all things by Him, whether visible or invisible, objects of sense or of intelligence, temporal, on account of a certain character given them, or eternal; and these eternal things He did not make by angels, or by any powers separated from His Ennoea. For God needs none of all these things, but is He who, by His Word and Spirit, makes, and disposes, and governs all things, and commands all things into existence—He who formed the world (for the world is of all)—He who fashioned man—He [who] is the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, above whom there is no other God, nor initial principle, nor power, nor pleroma,— He is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.²⁸

To the Marcionites' claim that written documents lacked divine authority, authenticity, and revelation, and possessed only the voice of their propagator, Irenaeus responded that the origin of the four Gospels used by the Catholic Church were those persons who wrote down under divine inspiration what was attested to by the apostles.²⁹ Finally, Irenaeus called attention to the Holy Spirit's continuing profession amongst true Christians; from creation to the time of Christ and the apostles and into Irenaeus's day, the Holy Spirit has borne witness that only one God, the Father, exists.³⁰ This pre-Trinitarian argument posited that all three members of the Christian godhead functioned as a singular being, rejecting Marcion's interpretation of the Creator God and Father God as two distinct beings in opposition to one another.

²⁷ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.20.7–8 (*ANF*, 1:489–90).

²⁸ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.22.1 (*ANF*, 1:347).

²⁹ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.1.1–2 (*ANF*, 1:414–15); Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.11.2 (*ANF*, 1:426).

³⁰ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.1.1 (*ANF*, 1:463).

Apostolic Succession

Irenaeus declared that the Catholic Church possessed the exclusive ability to contemplate apostolic truth and to preserve its tradition worldwide. He based this on the church's consistent succession of presbyters, a tradition ordained by the apostles and verifiable based on succession lists that demonstrated the uninterrupted passage of each bishopric from the apostles to Irenaeus's time.³¹ To answer the questions and refute the teachings posed by the Marcionites, Irenaeus declared the only right course of action was to turn to the most ancient of the churches founded by and on the apostles' teaching. He wanted to first examine their apostolic writings, and if no answer was evident, look to the unaltered teachings of these oldest churches and deduce an answer.³²

The Roman Church. The Roman Church was Irenaeus's preeminent example. This church was founded on Peter and Paul's teaching; this teaching had been preserved (uncompromised) from the apostles' lifetimes to Irenaeus's day; therefore, all churches must be in agreement with the Roman Church.³³ Irenaeus traced the Roman bishopric's lineage from Linus, who was mentioned in the epistles to Timothy, through Bishop Clement, who presided during a dispute at Corinth, to Elutherus, the bishop during Irenaeus's time. Irenaeus demonstrated that Clement dispatched an epistle of correction to Corinth that affirmed the Old Testament by proclaiming that only one God exists who created heaven, earth, and humanity; brought Noah's flood; called Abraham; instigated the exodus; gave the law to Moses; dispatched the prophets; and was the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ proclaimed in and by the church. To Irenaeus, the existence of Clement's letter proved that the apostolic message continued in unbroken succession

³¹ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.3.1–2 (*ANF*, 1:415–16).

³² Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.4.1 (*ANF*, 1:416–17).

³³ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.3.2 (*ANF*, 1:415–16).

from Linus to Clement to Elutherus.³⁴

The churches at Smyrna and Ephesus. Likewise, Polycarp of Smyrna learned from the apostles and was installed as bishop by an apostle. He testified of the singular faith of the Asiatic churches. Irenaeus noted that another Asiatic church, the church at Ephesus, also had a dual apostolic foundation: it was founded by Paul and shepherded by John into the reign of Emperor Trajan. Irenaeus considered these churches true witnesses of the tradition of the apostles.³⁵

Presbyterial Proof Texts

In the fourth book of *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus offered the testimony of a “certain presbyter” who learned directly from the apostles and their disciples.³⁶ This presbyter provides evidence of the sameness of God in both Testaments. He cites David as an example of persecution for righteousness’ sake (1 Sam 18) and punishment for his adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband (2 Sam 11:27). He presents Solomon as an example of God’s beneficence in bestowing wisdom (1 Kgs 4:34; 8:27) and the recipient of God’s punishment for departing from God’s ways (1 Kgs 11:1). These examples prove that God does not allow flesh to glory in his own presence.³⁷ The presbyter cites 1 Peter 3:19–20, the Lord’s descent into the earth to preach to the souls in prison, to show that the patriarchs, righteous men, and prophets were saved just as Gentiles. He states that all have sinned (Rom 3:23) and should be grateful that their sins were not imputed to them but forgiven through the Lord Jesus Christ. He further warns that as severe as God’s punishment was before his Son proclaimed him, it is right to fear

³⁴ Irenaeus, *Epid.* 8, 11, 13, 18–19, 24–28, 30 (Behr, 44–60). Irenaeus narrates to Marcianus the events taught by Clement of Rome in his epistle to Corinth. Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.3.3 (*ANF*, 1:416).

³⁵ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.3.4 (*ANF*, 1:416).

³⁶ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.27.1 (*ANF*, 1:498–99).

³⁷ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.27.1 (*ANF*, 1:498–99).

that his punishment is more severe after the Son has proclaimed him; therefore, all must avoid sinning against the Son and his Father.³⁸ The presbyter says the apostles taught that only one God is revealed in both Testaments; all other interpretations concerning multiple gods and angels involved in creation are unbiblical absurdities.³⁹ The fact that one God was the Creator was affirmed by the apostles, linking Genesis 1:3 to John 1:3, and Paul testifies that faith is in one God and Father above all, through all, and in all (Eph 4:5–6).⁴⁰

Irenaeus pointed out that both Testaments teach the same lessons about God from different angles that point to the same center: Christ. He devoted book 3 of *Against Heresies* to demonstrating that the Old Testament's ultimate purpose was showing God's foreknowledge through types and shadows of heavenly things that were not yet visible but later came to exist in the times of the church so that man would have faith in God.⁴¹ Consequently, Irenaeus commanded believers to obey only their church presbyters because they were the successors of the apostles, an unbroken lineage of leadership, and taught uncorrupted truth in harmony with the body of Scripture.⁴² Only those trained in this succession were legitimate teachers, and believers of this message could attest to the truth and consistency of their message: there is one God of the Law and the Prophets, one incarnate Son of God, one Spirit indwelling all, and one future advent of Christ to redeem and save both soul and body.⁴³

In contrast, propagators of Marcionite Christianity were of recent origin and lacked apostolic connections. They were inherently schismatic, heretical, and

³⁸ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.27.2 (*ANF*, 1:499).

³⁹ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.32.1 (*ANF*, 1:505–6).

⁴⁰ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.32.1 (*ANF*, 1:505–6).

⁴¹ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.32.1 (*ANF*, 1:506–7). In *Epid.* 31–42, Irenaeus demonstrates this foreknowledge, and in *Epid.* 43–96, Irenaeus systematically lays out proofs from the prophets that illustrate his point. Irenaeus, *Epid.* 31–96 (Behr, 60–67).

⁴² Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.33.8 (*ANF*, 1:508).

⁴³ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 5.20.1 (*ANF*, 1:547–48).

hypocritical, having fallen away from the truth. When compared to the consistent message of the Catholic Church, Marcionite teachings were in contradiction to the truth universally proclaimed by the apostles and thus heretical.⁴⁴

Irenaeus believes that properly trained apostolic elders would be able to discern the manifold absurdities of Marcionite Christianity: two gods separated by infinite distance; the “goodness” of an unknown god who steals some men from their creator to become subjects in a new kingdom but leaves others to perish; and the hypocrisy of a Messiah who would call himself the Son of Man if he lacked any connection to the Creator.⁴⁵

III: Delegitimizing Marcionite Hermeneutics

Irenaeus’s argument further demonstrates Marcionite Christianity’s illegitimacy by disproving their essential claims about God’s Old Testament actions. Marcionites claimed that God was the author of sin because he blinded the hearts of Pharaoh and his servants (Exod 9:35). However, Irenaeus directs attention to Jesus (Matt 13:11–16), who described this blinding as a straightforward rejection of those already sinning, a giving over of sinners to their sinfulness (cf. Rom 1:28; 2 Cor 4:4; 2 Thess 2:11).⁴⁶ Irenaeus cites God’s omniscience as justification: God knows who will choose to believe and who will choose to disbelieve, so it is not difficult to imagine that God would give them over to their unbelief. The hardening of Pharaoh’s heart in Exodus 3:19 is consistent with divine omniscience; Christ, too, reveals the meaning of his parables to his disciples but hides the meaning from those who would never believe.⁴⁷ Consequently,

⁴⁴ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.1.2 (*ANF*, 1:414–15); Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.3.1 (*ANF*, 1:415); Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.26.2 (*ANF*, 1:497); Irenaeus, *Haer.* 5.20.1 (*ANF*, 1:547–48).

⁴⁵ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.33.2 (*ANF*, 1:506–7).

⁴⁶ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.29.1 (*ANF*, 1:502).

⁴⁷ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.29.2 (*ANF*, 1:502).

Jesus's actions towards believers and disbelievers is identical to the actions of Yahweh and demonstrates that Jesus's own actions are identical to those of Yahweh.

Irenaeus also debunks the Marcionite belief that the Israelites' spoiling of Egypt the night before they departed was evil. Citing the Presbyter, Irenaeus proclaims the teaching that every living person receives property of various types, either from labor, as gifts, or in exchange. He demonstrates that the Egyptians were debtors to Joseph because he saved the entire nation through his actions.⁴⁸ Additionally, not only did the Egyptians fail to compensate Joseph for saving their lives, but they oppressed the Israelites with cruel slavery and bondage, not only withholding payments from them but also seeking to annihilate their entire race. The Presbyter concludes that what the Israelites took was not equal to or in excess of what was owed, but only a small portion of the wealth Israel had created for the Egyptians during their slavery. Therefore, the Egyptians would be unjust to accuse Israel of taking the spoils, and likewise, the Marcionite claim that it was evil for God to allow Israel to take spoils was illegitimate.⁴⁹ Israel used these goods to create the tabernacle, while Irenaeus uses this example as a type, corresponding to the use of what we receive from others to serve Christ through the church.⁵⁰ Irenaeus further supports the Presbyter's argument from Exodus typology: just as Israel came out of Egypt, so too does the church come out of the nations. The nations will suffer the plagues of Egypt in the Apocalypse because they likewise prevent the church from receiving her just wages.⁵¹

Irenaeus refuted the Marcionite allegation that the actions of both the Creator and Israel towards Egypt were sinful and reminds readers that the Presbyter taught

⁴⁸ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.30.1 (*ANF*, 1:502–3).

⁴⁹ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.30.2 (*ANF*, 1:503).

⁵⁰ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.30.4 (*ANF*, 1:504).

⁵¹ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.30.4 (*ANF*, 1:504).

believers not to call sin that which Scripture does not call sin. Irenaeus used Lot as another type to draw a comparison between the two covenant institutions, the synagogue and the church. Lot was unconscious when his daughters had sex with him as his daughters sincerely believed all other men were extinct upon the earth. Therefore, they were innocent of criminal intentions against their father, as they only planned to raise up children to carry on their father's line.⁵² This type represents that the elder (synagogue) and the younger (church) exclusively receive life from God the Father.⁵³ Additionally, Lot's wife represented the church as pure salt, enduring in the world without corruption and reminding people that while members may fall away due to suffering, the church itself will bear children to the Father by the power of the Spirit and endure forever.⁵⁴ Since the Bible neither declares the actions of Lot's daughters nor the actions of God and the Israelites against Egypt as sinful, then it is wrong for anyone, including the Marcionites, to pronounce these actions as sinful and evil.

Irenaeus cited the Presbyter's clarification that the sins of past generations were recorded for the present. Only one God exists who both rewards and punishes. Paul's assertion in 1 Corinthians 10, which recalls Exodus 32:6, demonstrates that all things that came before were figures, or types, to warn and prepare believers for the coming revelation and exaltation of the Son.⁵⁵ To the Presbyter's argument from 1 Corinthians 10, Irenaeus adds observations from other New Testament writers and demonstrates that the God who punished Old Testament rebels is the same God who punishes those who rebel against him and his Son in the New Testament. Citing Matthew 18:8–9 and 25:41, 1 Corinthians 5:11 and 6:9–10, Ephesians 5:6–7, and 2 Thessalonians

⁵² Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.31.1 (*ANF*, 1:504–5).

⁵³ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.31.2 (*ANF*, 1:505).

⁵⁴ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.31.3 (*ANF*, 1:505).

⁵⁵ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.27.3 (*ANF*, 1:499–500).

1:6–10, Irenaeus showed that the same deeds that are punished under the law are punished under the New Testament, further proving the sameness of the divine identity across both Testaments.⁵⁶ Instead of two gods with contrary standards, there was one God whose standards are the same across both Testaments.

Irenaeus also faults Marcion for misinterpreting Matthew 11:27; Marcion declared that since no one knew the Father before the Son came, the Father himself must have been unknown before Christ came. If such were true, they should have asked why God was unknown before Jesus came instead of declaring another God existed.⁵⁷ Irenaeus also referred to Marcion's contemporary, Justin Martyr, who declared he would not have believed the Lord himself if Jesus had declared another God besides the Creator and that the Son's coming from this God who is creator and administrator of the universe is what makes steadfast faith possible.⁵⁸

Irenaeus exegetes Matthew 11:27 to declare that the invisible Father sent his Son (the Word), to come and reveal the invisible Father to humanity. The Son's incarnation is the knowledge of the Father made relationally visible, as the Son reveals his Father to every person he encounters.⁵⁹ Irenaeus further declared the Father reveals the Son to justly admit those who believe in the Son to eternal life and justly exclude those who refuse the Son from eternal life.⁶⁰ God's Son, the Word, preached himself and the Father from the Law and the Prophets; the Son is the visible manifestation of the invisible Father, and everyone must choose either to accept or reject.⁶¹ Donovan observes

⁵⁶ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.27.4 (*ANF*, 1:500–501).

⁵⁷ Mary Ann Donovan, *One Right Reading? A Guide to Irenaeus* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1997), 103; Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.6.2 (*ANF*, 1:468).

⁵⁸ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.6.2 (*ANF*, 1:469).

⁵⁹ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.6.3 (*ANF*, 1:468).

⁶⁰ Donovan, *One Right Reading?*, 103; Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.6.5 (*ANF*, 1:468–69).

⁶¹ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.6.6 (*ANF*, 1:469).

Irenaeus's use of Christ's varied Sabbath healings to prove that the purpose of his arrival was the fulfillment of the law.⁶² This served Irenaeus's purpose—to delegitimize the Marcionite charge that Jesus and his God were unknown before the Son's manifestation.

Irenaeus also contrasted the temporal, limited, specific wrath of God against various Old Testament sinners with the eternal, unlimited punishment of those who reject the Son, citing Jesus's own declaration that it would have been better for them if they had never been born (Matt 26:24). Irenaeus noted that Sodom and Gomorrah's punishment was more tolerable than what is coming upon those who reject him (Matt 10:15), another depiction of the same deity across both Testaments.⁶³ He says the Son's presence and his command to abstain from both sinful thoughts and actions brings a corresponding increase in covenant awareness, therefore justifying this intensification of punishment.⁶⁴ The Marcionites fail to see that God punished the Egyptians with temporal destruction but saved the Israelites who obeyed him; likewise, God eternally judges those who reject him and forever frees, saves, or releases those who obey him.⁶⁵ By citing and deconstructing these essential Marcionite arguments, Irenaeus demonstrated why only the Catholic Church's interpreters should be recognized.

Summary

Irenaeus aimed to invalidate Marcionite Christianity and establish the Old Testament as part of Catholic Christianity. To do this, he demonstrated that the Catholic faith and tradition descended from the apostles. He also explicated the existential attributes of God and used these attributes to discredit Marcion's two gods. He used the Old Testament, the testimony of apostolically founded churches, the witness of church

⁶² Donovan, *One Right Reading?*, 104.

⁶³ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.28.1 (*ANF*, 1:501).

⁶⁴ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.28.2 (*ANF*, 1:501).

⁶⁵ Irenaeus, *Haer.* 4.28.3 (*ANF*, 1:501–2).

presbyters, and evidence that Jesus Christ fulfilled all the prophecies to prove that the Creator God was the Father of Christ. In contrast, he noted Marcion's excommunication from the church, the lack of written or apostolic proof that his unknown God existed, and the schismatic nature of Marcion's teaching.

In response to the Marcionite allegations of the Old Testament God's unjust actions, Irenaeus illustrated that these actions were rightly proportionate to the increased degree of greater justice administered in the New Testament. He simultaneously disproved multiple fundamental Marcionite pillars of belief by appealing to proofs from an apostolic presbyter, and demonstrated the logic of why this, and other apostolic presbyters' teachings, deriving from the apostles themselves, were the only legitimate basis of biblical interpretation.

CHAPTER 5

IRENÆUS’S RELEVANCE TODAY

Irenaeus and the Catholic Church considered Marcion, his teaching, and his religious movement heretical. Irenaeus had gained his knowledge and position from the apostles and apostolic fathers and sought to combat heresy and establish orthodox doctrine. In refuting Marcionite Christianity, Irenaeus proved the necessity of retaining the Scripture that showed the Creator God was the Father God of the Son, Jesus Christ. This thesis concludes with observations on the modern relevance of these ancient arguments between Marcion and Irenaeus.

The Continuing Relevance of These Ancient Arguments

In the centuries since Marcion lived, various scholars have questioned the Old Testament’s continuing relevance in Christian thought and practice. Jewish scholar Yaniv Feller observes Marcion through the eyes of Martin Buber, one of two men who translated the Bible into German. Buber viewed Marcion as the embodiment of Christian gnosis. Buber believed a modern twentieth-century neo-Marcionite attempt to “detach Christianity from its Jewish roots” was nearly complete because most Christians understood their Bible to be only the New Testament and, perhaps, the Psalms.¹ Feller notes that even Buber entertained thoughts that Paul rejected the Torah.² However, Buber later changed his position and considered one of his “greatest achievements” his ability to

¹ Yaniv Feller, “From Aher to Marcion: Martin Buber’s Understanding of Gnosis,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 20, no. 4 (2013): 390–91.

² Feller, “From Aher to Marcion,” 393–94.

convince Christians that they must have the Old Testament to understand their faith.³

In 2018, Andy Stanley, senior pastor of North Point Community Church, stated that “Christians need to ‘unhitch’ the Old Testament from their faith.” Stanley declared his belief that the Old Testament was “divinely inspired,” but he also stated that it should not be the “go-to source regarding any behavior in the church.”⁴ Michael Gryboski of the *Christian Post* noted that Stanley justified this viewpoint utilizing Acts 15, saying, “Peter, James, Paul elected to unhitch the Christian faith from their Jewish Scriptures, and my friends, we must as well.”⁵ Stanley’s appeal was directed to individuals who had left Christianity because of what the Bible taught on “certain things.”⁶ His justification for this “unhitching” followed his interpretation that the apostles’ motivation was to not make it difficult for Gentiles to turn to God. Gryboski also cited Stanley’s preaching at the Orange Conference just days before, where he used Acts 15 and John 17 to argue that church unity was more important than “theological correctness.”⁷ Stanley argued for a unity that would retain apostates who left the church because of the Old Testament’s teachings.

In August 2018, Albert Mohler, president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, addressed the controversy and likened it to the heresy of Marcion.⁸ Mohler

³ Feller, “From Aher to Marcion,” 397.

⁴ Michael Gryboski, “Christians Must ‘Unhitch’ Old Testament from Their Faith, Says Andy Stanley,” *The Christian Post*, May 9, 2018, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/christians-must-unhitch-old-testament-from-their-faith-says-andy-stanley.html>.

⁵ Gryboski, “Christians Must ‘Unhitch’ Old Testament from Their Faith.”

⁶ Gryboski, “Christians Must ‘Unhitch’ Old Testament from Their Faith.”

⁷ Gryboski, “Christians Must ‘Unhitch’ Old Testament from Their Faith.” Gryboski quotes Andy Stanley’s justification: “[Jesus] prayed for our oneness, that we’d be on the same page,” said Stanley at the conference last month. “This is mission critical. If they are not one, we will not win . . . unity is mission critical, and disunity disrupts the mission.”

⁸ R. Albert Mohler Jr., “Getting ‘Unhitched’ from the Old Testament? Andy Stanley Aims at Heresy,” last modified August 10, 2018, <https://albertmohler.com/2018/08/10/getting-unhitched-old-testament-andy-stanley-aims-heresy>. Mohler quotes Andy Stanley’s statement to illustrate the nature of the controversy: “Peter, James, Paul elected to unhitch the Christian faith from their Jewish scriptures, and my friends, we must as well.”

observed that Stanley’s sermon did not argue for any specific commands to be abrogated but purported that the first-century church disconnected itself from the “worldview, value system, and regulations of the Jewish Scriptures.”⁹ Mohler notes that in a later interview with Jonathan Merritt, Stanley remarks, “I’m convinced that we make a better case for Jesus if we leave the Old Testament or the old covenant out of the argument.”¹⁰

He goes on to tell Merritt that until the fourth century, no single book called the Bible existed that contained the Jewish Scripture and the Christian writings.¹¹ While Mohler affirms that Jesus and his apostles did not have a single book called the Bible, he counters that Jesus and the apostles’ references to Scripture are plainly known. Mohler refers to Bible scholar Mark Hamilton’s definition of the English word “Bible.” Hamilton writes that “the Greek phrase *ta biblia*, ‘the books,’ [was] an expression Hellenistic Jews used to describe their sacred books several centuries before the time of Jesus.”¹²

Mohler says, “We are looking here at the ancient heresy of Marcion,” and notes that while Stanley has not fully endorsed Marcion’s heresy, he still appears to aim for this heretical notion. Likewise, Stanley has aimed his congregation in that direction. Mohler writes that though Stanley affirms the same God in both Testaments, he also teaches that God has revealed himself in two entirely diverse ways, “just like Marcion.”¹³ This is not the first time Stanley has courted controversy. Mohler observes that in 2016, Stanley encouraged people to get over “the Bible tells me so,” citing deconversion stories of people leaving Christianity. He said, “If the Bible is the foundation of your faith, here’s the problem: it’s all or nothing. Christianity becomes a fragile all or nothing house

⁹ Mohler, “Getting ‘Unhitched’ from the Old Testament?”

¹⁰ Mohler, “Getting ‘Unhitched’ from the Old Testament?”

¹¹ Mohler, “Getting ‘Unhitched’ from the Old Testament?”

¹² Mark Hamilton, “From Hebrew Bible to Christian Bible: Jews, Christians, and the Word of God,” PBS Frontline, last modified April 1998, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/religion/first/scriptures.html>, quoted in Mohler, “Getting ‘Unhitched’ from the Old Testament?”

¹³ Mohler, “Getting ‘Unhitched’ from the Old Testament?”

of cards religion.”¹⁴ Irenaeus would disagree. Writing to Marcianus, Irenaeus declared, “This, beloved, is the preaching of the truth and this is the character of our salvation, and this is the way of life, which the prophets announced, and Christ confirmed, and the apostles handed over and the Church, in the whole world, hands down to her children.”¹⁵ Unlike Stanley, Irenaeus’s statement indicates that he saw the Scriptures as the only appropriate foundation for the church and its members; everything else was false gnosis.

Summary

Martin Buber and Andy Stanley are but two examples of how a proper understanding of Irenaeus’s refutation of Marcion’s heresy enables modern Christians to support the relevance of the Old Testament in the canon. Irenaeus’s defense of the Old Testament, his explanation of apostolic succession, and his description of church history and doctrine simultaneously defended the Catholic Church and repudiated Marcion’s theology and community. After nearly two millennia, Irenaeus’s value to the church was recognized by Pope Francis, who declared Irenaeus a Doctor of the Church with the title *Doctor unitatis*, or Doctor of Unity.¹⁶ Pope Francis declared his hope that Irenaeus’s teachings “would encourage the journey all of Christ’s disciples towards full communion.” He noted that Irenaeus’s name means “peace,” a peace that “comes from the Lord and which reconciles, restoring unity.” Indeed, Irenaeus’s work to assert the Christocentricity of the Old Testament and to establish the unity of the Testaments is an apologetic that is still vital in our day.

¹⁴ Mohler, “Getting ‘Unhitched’ from the Old Testament?”

¹⁵ Irenaeus of Lyons, *Epid.* 98 (Behr, 100–101).

¹⁶ Pope Francis, “Decree of the Holy Father for the Conferral of the Title Doctor of the Church on Saint Irenaeus of Lyon,” Holy See Press Office, last modified January 21, 2022.

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ABSTRACT

IRENÆUS'S DEFENSE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT AS PART OF THE CANON OF SCRIPTURE

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During the second century, emerging Christianity had to wrestle with its understanding of the Jewishness of both Jesus of Nazareth and the Old Testament Scriptures. Two voices emerged within the church as it wrestled with this issue: Marcion of Sinope and Irenaeus of Lyons. Marcion rejected the church's use of the Old Testament and propagated a theology that radically reinterpreted both the Old and New Testaments as being existentially opposed to one another; this became his justification for urging the church to abandon all use of the Old Testament. By contrast, Irenaeus of Lyons, a student of the apostle John's disciple, Polycarp, defended the church's use of the Old Testament and its placement within the Christian canon.

This thesis examines Irenaeus's defense of the Old Testament as part of the New Testament canon through the lens of his rebuttal of Marcion's teachings. First, this thesis examines Marcion's life and teachings that became known as Marcionite Christianity and informs the reader concerning what he proposed as the basis of Christian faith, in opposition to the emerging Catholic Church. Second, this thesis examines Irenaeus's biographical, temporal, geographical, and relational contexts and explains why he was the prime authority to defend Catholic Christianity at large against Marcion's heresy. This examination is supported by considering Irenaeus's surviving writings and the nature of his interpretive thought process, which informed his understanding of Scripture. Third, this thesis examines Irenaeus's defense of the Old Testament through

his appeal to eyewitness testimony dating from the time of Jesus of Nazareth to Irenaeus's day and in light of its refutation of the key accusations Marcionites used to justify their rejection of the Old Testament. Finally, this thesis concludes with a demonstration of why Irenaeus's Old Testament defense is still vital in the present day by assessing examples from both the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

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