

# The Origin of the Marcionites

by Melissa Elizabeth Cutler

## 1 Contents

<u>1 Contents.....</u>	<u>1</u>
<u>2 Introduction.....</u>	<u>2</u>
<u>3 The traditional dates of Marcion's life.....</u>	<u>3</u>
<u>4 Problems with the Traditional Dates of Marcion's Life.....</u>	<u>6</u>
<u>5 Acceptance of the Epistles of Paul among Catholic Christians.....</u>	<u>7</u>
<u>6 The Epistles of Ignatius and Polycarp.....</u>	<u>9</u>
<u>7 Conclusions.....</u>	<u>13</u>

## 2 Introduction

In my previous article *Brief Introduction to the Marcionite Scripture* I argued that, contrary to popular belief, the version of the Pauline epistles owned by the Marcionites were very close to the originals written by the apostle, and that the traditional version of the epistles of Paul were corrupted by the addition of numerous fraudulent passages. The position that I have adopted is a controversial one and the reader may well be wondering how such a scenario is even possible. It is widely said that that Marcionite movement did not exist until the mid-second century AD, and the the epistles of Paul were widely distributed and accepted in Catholic circles long before that time; that being the case, how could anyone have made such large scale changes to the epistles of Paul during such a late period - and why didn't anyone besides Marcion notice these alterations being made?

It may seem that my argument falls at the first hurdle, being profoundly incompatible with the traditional account of history; however, numerous notable scholars and historians have called into question the traditional account of history, as it was written by Marcion's bitter enemies the Catholic Church fathers. The purpose of this article is to back up the arguments made in my previous article by examining the historical sources and presenting evidence that:

- 1) Marcionite (or perhaps "proto-Marcionite") Christianity existed long before the mid second century. By implication the shorter (Marcionite) version of the epistles of Paul must also have existed long before the mid second century.
- 2) The epistles of Paul were not widely distributed or accepted within Catholic circles until the time of Irenaeus (the late second century).

By challenging the traditional perception of history on these two points I aim to show that it was indeed possible for a Catholic editor to make large scale changes to the epistles of Paul and propagate the altered versions in Catholic circles before the widespread acceptance of those documents.

If the long and short versions of the epistles both existed (in different regions of the Roman Empire) before the mid second century (and the supposed origins of the Marcionite movement) then it becomes very easy to see how it is possible for the shorter version to be the original, and the long version corrupt. When approaching this I will try to avoid simply relying on the opinions of modern scholars, and will instead focus mainly on ancient historical sources.

This essay is structured into the following sections:

- I will examine the version of history presented by Marcion's adversaries. They claimed that his beliefs and scriptures were once the same as theirs, and that he diverged from their version of Christianity in the mid second century. However their various accounts contradict one another on almost every detail of the stories they present; upon deeper investigation it becomes apparent that their accounts are highly distorted by bias, to such an extent that they statements cannot be taken at face value or be used to reconstruct an accurate historical narrative.

- I will highlight the contradictions and inconsistencies bound up in the traditional account of the history of the Marcionites.
- I provide evidence that the traditional version of the epistles of Paul were not widely accepted by Catholics until the late second century - long after the time of Marcion.
- I will examine the epistles of Ignatius and Polycarp. The authors of these epistles certainly held Paul and his epistles in high regard, and they are commonly said to pre-date the time of Marcion; however, I will provide evidence that they were actually written after the emergence of Marcionite beliefs.

### 3 The traditional dates of Marcion's life

Marcion was mentioned by several ancient Catholics, including: Justin Martyr (c100-165AD), Irenaeus of Lyons (c130- c200AD), Clement of Alexandria (c150-c215AD), Tertullian (c160- c225AD) and Epiphanius (c351-403AD). From their writings historians attempt to reconstruct information about the life of Marcion, and the origins of the Marcionite movement; this is not as straight forward as one might think however, as the ancient writers are highly biased, and contradict one another repeatedly.

Irenaeus writes that Marcion learned many of his ideas in Rome from Cerdon<sup>1</sup> (another early Christian leader condemned by Irenaeus). Irenaeus indicates that Marcion succeeded Cerdon while Anicetus was pope (157 to 168). He also accuses Marcion of removing large quantities of text from the *Gospel of Luke* and the epistles of Paul, thus creating the Marcionite bible<sup>2</sup>. Irenaeus describes the day in which Marcion was rejected by the church in Rome in *Adversus Haereses* 3:3:4; he records a meeting between Marcion and Polycarp of Smyrna in which Marcion was shapely rebuked and called the “first-born of Satan”.

Tertullian and Clement of Alexandria also wrote about Marcion. They agree with Irenaeus that Marcion founded his movement in the mid second century, and did so by altering the pre-existing *Gospel of Luke* and epistles of Paul; but they and Irenaeus contradict one another on almost every other point.

Tertullian claims that the Marcionites believed that there were 115 between Jesus and the founding of their movement. From this he calculates that:

Of this teacher [Marcion] there is no doubt that he is a heretic of the Antonine period [i.e. during the reign of emperor Antonius Pius 138-161AD], impious under the pious [a pun based on the emperor's name]. Now, from Tiberius [who was emperor during Jesus' day] to Antoninus Pius, there are about 115 years and 6 1/2 months. Just such an interval do they place between Christ and Marcion.

Tertullian, in *Against Marcion*, book 1, chapter 19, verse 2; see also 4:4:5 and 5:19:2.

---

1 *Adversus Haereses* 3:4:3

2 *Adversus Haereses* 1:27

At first glance this would seem to be incontrovertible proof that even the Marcionites accepted that their movement diverged from a well defined Catholic church during the mid second century; but if the Marcionites already believed this, why does Tertullian need to present this elaborate calculation to prove it to them - if they accepted these time scales then such detailed discussion would be unnecessary. We should be wary then of the possibility that Tertullian is misrepresenting the Marcionite position in order to make his arguments more convincing to his Catholic readers (remember that Tertullian did not just aim to convert Marcionites, but to prevent Catholics from investigating their ideas and converting to their views). I will elaborate more on the strategy being employed by Tertullian shortly; meanwhile suffice it to say that he is contradicted yet again by Clement of Alexandria, who records the views of the Marcionites and Gnostics in *Stromata* 7:17:

For that the human assemblies which they held were posterior to the Catholic Church requires not many words to show.

For the teaching of our Lord at His advent, beginning with [the times of emperors] Augustus and Tiberius, was completed in the middle of the times of Tiberius.

And that [period of the teaching] of the apostles, embracing the ministry of Paul, ends with [emperor] Nero. It was later, in the times of Adrian the king, that those who invented the heresies arose; and they extended to the age of Antoninus the elder, as, for instance, Basilides, though he claims (as they boast) for his master, Glaucias, the interpreter of Peter.

Likewise they allege that Valentinus was a hearer of Theudas. And he was the pupil of Paul. For Marcion, who arose in the same age with them, lived as an old man with the younger [heretics]. And after him Simon heard for a little the preaching of Peter.

There was a lively dispute taking place between the Catholics and the Marcionites, as each group claimed that their own teaching originated with the apostles, and that of the other was a later invention. The Marcionites themselves believed that Marcion learned directly from Paul.

It is worth noticing the way that Clement thinks. He divides time up into the time of Jesus (ending in about 30AD), the time of the apostles (ending in about 68AD), and then the time of "heresy" (beginning during the reign of Hadrian in 117AD). This would imply that the Catholic Church was established and pure for nearly half a century before the "heretics" starting to "invent" new ideas. Under such circumstances the rival forms of Christianity hardly be taken seriously - it is obvious why these dates appeal to Clement as they do. Irenaeus and Tertullian think and argue along precisely the same lines:

The truth is to be found nowhere else but in the Catholic Church, the sole depository of apostolic doctrine. Heresies are of recent formation, and cannot trace their origin up to the apostles.

Irenaeus, chapter heading of *Adversus Haereses*, book 3, chapter 4.

I am accustomed in my prescription against all heresies, to fix my compendious criterion (of truth) in the testimony of time; claiming priority therein as our rule, and alleging lateness to

be the characteristic of every heresy.  
Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem*, 5:19:1, Holmes translation.

Irenaeus argues that the Catholic Church has a “lineage” of bishops and teachers that runs right back to the apostles. He also constructs a lineage for the “heretics”; linking them to one another and ultimately back to Simon Magus (the magician who opposed the apostles in the book of *Acts*). Irenaeus thus portrays heretics as a separate and unrelated development from the lineage of the apostles. Each of their “inventions” contradicts traditional teaching that has already been established. With this agenda, the Catholic writers would have been motivated to make considerable distortions in their record of the dates and places that the rival forms of Christianity originated. This is why their separate accounts are so garbled and contradictory as they are - they unanimously agree that the heretical movements they fight against must originate in the second century; but as their accounts revolve around ideology rather than evidence, they bear no resemblance to one another on any other point.

The *Chronicle of Edessa* (another ancient Catholic source) records the date of the founding of the Marcionite movement as 138AD; this also contradicts all other ancient sources. Trying to construct a consistent and accurate chronology for Marcion’s life and preaching career from such inconsistent sources is like trying to knit with fog. I have not had time to analyse in detail the contradictions between the writings of Irenaeus, Clement and Tertullian, however the contradictions are neatly summarised in this passage from the work of Hoffmann:

Tertullian’s elaborate calculation like Irenaeus’ genealogy and Clement’s ambiguous chronology must be seen in this light. It is an attempt to counteract the effects of a tradition according to which Marcionism had developed much earlier than in the times of Antoninus. But the attempt leads to no consensus. Certain they are that Marcion did not converse with the apostles: but they are far from certain about the facts of his life. Did his heresy erupt under Hadrian (Clement) or under Antoninus (Tertullian)? Was he a member of the church at Rome under Telesphorus and a heretic under Hyginus (Tertullian), or a follower of Cerdo under the reign of Anicetus (Irenaeus)?

Quotation from *Marcion: On the Restitution of Christianity*.

On this basis of the writings of Irenaeus, Clement and Tertullian, the Marcionite movement is sometimes said to have originated in about 144AD, though scholars agree that in reality it must have been earlier than this; estimates given by modern historians vary dramatically, due to the inconsistencies and unreliability of the sources that they have to work from.

## 4 Problems with the Traditional Dates of Marcion's Life

Tertullian supposedly wrote just a few decades after the start of Marcion's preaching. He recorded that the Marcionites had a large, widespread and well organised and independent network of Churches and bishops (*Adversus Marcionem* 4:4); he even compares them to a great "swarm of wasps", building churches as "wasps build combs". He is not alone in indicating that the Marcionites were a large and well established group, Irenaeus' statements on the matter (written in the late second century) can be found in *Adversus Haereses* 111:4:3. If the Marcionite movement started as late as the mid second century how could it have spread to far and so fast in such a short space of time?

According to the traditional view of history the epistles of Paul were already well accepted and widely distributed in Catholic circles prior to the time of Marcion. If that were so then, when the Christians of the second century first heard Marcion preach that the Creator-God of the Jews was not the true God, why did they not at once check this against verses like *Romans* 1:2, 1:25, 3:21, 4:3, etc. If traditional Christian beliefs and scriptures were already widespread across the empire then it is inconceivable that Marcion would have gained more than a handful of converts. Clearly something is very wrong with the traditional version of history. Either:

- Marcion lived much earlier than traditional supposed, and lived before the epistles of Paul were widely distributed and accepted.
- The Catholic version of the epistles of Paul became widely distributed and accepted much later than has traditionally been supposed: sometime after the establishment of the Marcionite movement.
- Or, if the epistles of Paul were widely distributed and accepted prior to Marcion's time, their content must have been very different to the modern content of those epistles; many of the verses that contradict Marcionite theology must not yet have been present in the text.

The chain of events becomes much more plausible if we acknowledge that in reality Marcion pre-dated the widespread establishment of Catholic orthodoxy, and begun his movement in a time when Christian beliefs (and by implication, scriptures) varied considerably from one Christian community to the next.

This is why I must reject the stories of Irenaeus, Clement, Tertullian and Epiphanius, and the traditionally accepted chronology of Marcion's life which is based on their writings; I turn my attention instead to another (earlier) source from which we may glean valuable information.

And there is Marcion, a man of Pontus, who is even at this day alive, and teaching his disciples to believe in some other god greater than the Creator. And he, by the aid of the devils, has caused many of every nation to speak blasphemies, and to deny that God is the maker of this universe, and to assert that some other being, greater than He, has done greater works. All who take their opinions from these men, are, as we before said, called Christians;

just as also those who do not agree with the philosophers in their doctrines, have yet in common with them the name of philosophers given to them.

Justin Martyr, in the *First Apology*, chapter 26 - This is the oldest document that mentions Marcion by name; and is generally dated by scholars to around 151-155AD.

Notice that Justin expresses surprise that Marcion is still alive “even at this day”, and he tells us that Marcion’s teaching has had time to spread to “many of every nation”. This makes little sense if Marcion had begun to preach a mere seven years ago! The implication is that by the mid second century Marcion is an old man; he has been preaching for a considerable time, with great success, and his message has had time to become well established across the whole empire.

## 5 Acceptance of the Epistles of Paul among Catholic Christians

Besides questioning the dates traditionally assigned to the establishment of the Marcionite movement, we should also question the assumption that the traditional versions of *Luke*, *Acts* and the epistles of Paul received widespread acceptance early on in Christian history.

The table below lists nearly all of the Christian writers who lived (or may have lived) before or soon after Marcion, and who's writings (or at least fragments of them) survive. It summarises whether or not the authors had heard of the existence of Paul, or the epistles of Paul.

Name of document(s) or writer	Knowledge of Paul and the epistles of Paul	Probable date <sup>3</sup>
<i>Hebrews</i>	Paul is not mentioned anywhere in the text.	50 to 95AD
<i>The Didache</i>	Paul is not mentioned anywhere in the text.	50 to 120AD
<i>Gospel of Mark</i>	Paul is not mentioned anywhere in the text.	65 to 80AD
<i>James</i>	Paul is not mentioned by name, though the author appears to be opposing ideas and arguments that are found in the epistles of Paul.	70 to 100AD
<i>Gospel of Matthew</i>	Paul is not mentioned anywhere in the text.	80 to 100AD
<i>1 Peter</i>	Paul is not mentioned anywhere in the text.	80 to 110AD

<sup>3</sup> These dates are based on those given at [www.earlychristianwritings.com](http://www.earlychristianwritings.com).

<i>Epistle of Barnabas</i>	Paul is not mentioned anywhere in the text.	80 to 120AD
<i>1 Clement</i>	Knew of Paul and quoted from his epistles.	80 to 140AD (may post-date Marcion)
<i>Revelations</i>	Paul is not mentioned anywhere in the text.	90 to 95AD
<i>John and 1 John</i>	Paul is not mentioned anywhere in these books.	90 to 120AD
John the Elder (2 <i>John</i> and 3 <i>John</i> )	Paul is not mentioned anywhere in these epistles.	90 to 120AD
<i>Jude</i>	Paul is not mentioned anywhere in the text.	90 to 120AD
<i>Shepherd of Hermas</i>	Paul is not mentioned anywhere in the text.	100 to 160AD (probably post-dates Marcion)
<i>2 Peter</i>	Knew of Paul and his epistles	100 to 160AD (probably post-dates Marcion)
The seven epistles of Ignatius	The author knew of Paul and quoted from his epistles	105 to 115AD (may post-date Marcion <sup>4</sup> )
Polycarp's epistle	The author knew of Paul and quoted from his epistles	110 to 140AD (may post-date Marcion)
Papias	Paul is not mentioned anywhere in the surviving fragments of Papias' writings.	110 to 140AD (may post-date Marcion)
<i>2 Clement</i>	Paul is not mentioned anywhere in the text.	130 to 160AD (may post-date Marcion)
<i>Epistle to Diognetus</i>	Paul is not mentioned anywhere in the text.	130 to 200AD (may post-date Marcion)
Justin Martyr	The surviving authentic documents give no indication that he had heard of Paul.	150 to 160AD (post-dates Marcion)
Hegesippus	Paul is not mentioned anywhere in the surviving fragments of his writings.	165 to 175AD (post-dates Marcion)

Even the book of *Acts* itself makes no mention of the epistles of Paul. This is significant because *Acts* was written by the same person as the *Gospel of Luke*<sup>5</sup>. Thus the editor

4 Evidence that the epistles of Ignatius and Polycarp post-date Marcion is discussed in section 6 of this article.

5 see *Luke* 1:1-4 and *Acts* 1:1.



who re-wrote the *Marcionite Gospel* to create *Luke* was willing to accept Paul as a legitimate Christian teacher, but even he did not trust the teaching found in the epistles of Paul at that time. I have written more about the author of *Acts* and his perception of Paul in the article *The Root of the Corruption*. I have also already discussed the unreliability of *2 Peter*; see my article *The History of the Christian Bible*.

There are only four writers whose work can be put forward as evidence that the traditional version of the epistles of Paul existed before the time of Marcion; I have already discussed *2 Peter*, the other three are:

- Clement of Rome (said to be the author of an epistle called *1 Clement*)
- Polycarp (said to be the author of *Polycarp's Epistle to the Philippians*)
- Ignatius of Antioch (said to be the author of the seven epistles of Ignatius)

There are signs that all of these epistles may be forgeries from the mid second century<sup>6</sup> (after the time of Marcion). But, let us suppose that these three authors did live in the late first and early second centuries, and let us suppose that they pre-date Marcion; four authors out of twenty one from a similar period (19%) is hardly evidence that Paul's writings received widespread acceptance at that time!

My primary purpose of this article is to answer the question: If the early Catholics made extensive alterations to the epistles of Paul, then why didn't anyone besides Marcion notice or object?

I think the answer to that question is now clear; the epistles of Paul were not in fact widely accepted in non-Marcionite circles until the time of Irenaeus - the late second century, well after the time of Marcion. There may have been a small number of "Catholic" Christians who accepted them at this time; but, even that is very much in doubt.

## 6 The Epistles of Ignatius and Polycarp

For further evidence that the epistles of Paul were not widely accepted among Catholics before the time of Marcion, let us turn our attention to the epistles of Ignatius and Polycarp; the authors of these epistles clearly knew of Paul, and they are commonly said to pre-date Marcion. We can judge directly from the content of these epistles whether or not they are likely to pre-date Marcion.

The epistles of Ignatius present us with the scenario that they were written in the time of emperor Trajan (98 - 117AD), and that their author was being transported to Rome under guard to face death in the Roman arena. It was on his journey to Rome that he supposedly wrote seven epistles to several Christian communities, and to his friend Polycarp. These seven epistles indicate that most Christian communities were utterly

6 See for example the arguments listed in [www.hermann-detering.de/clem\\_engl.htm](http://www.hermann-detering.de/clem_engl.htm); Hermann Detering also discusses these issues in *The Falsified Paul* (page 74 onwards); an English translation has been published in the *Journal of Higher Criticism* and is available online: [www.radikalkritik.de/FabricatedJHC.pdf](http://www.radikalkritik.de/FabricatedJHC.pdf)

infested with a “heresy” called docetism. Docetism is the belief that Jesus physical body was an illusion; that in reality he was a spirit. It is closely linked to the belief that Jesus did not suffer physical pain on the cross (because it was a spiritual act only). Docetics also believed that the eternal life offered by Jesus was for souls only, that resurrection (both his and ours) was spiritual and not physical. Believers were said to become part of the resurrection when they received the Holy Spirit, at which point they could no longer die; they would only cast off the flesh, when their body passed away and their soul was said to escape from the physical world. The fact that Ignatius (supposedly in about 115AD) was surrounded by “heresy” on all sides shows that Ignatius, Clement and Tertullian were living in a dream world when they claimed that teachings opposed to their own did not become widespread until after the time of emperor Trajan. Those writers didn’t just claim that Marcionism appeared late; they claimed that all “heresy” appeared late; yet even the earliest Christian documents indicate that there were divisions within the church.

The Marcionites were docetic, but they were not the only docetic group in the ancient world. Unfortunately, Ignatius deliberately avoids naming the “heretics” he opposes (see the epistle to the *Smyrnaeans*, chapter 5). He doesn’t deliberately give us a description of their beliefs either, but to a certain extent we can work it out much from the things he writes to oppose them:

Stop your ears, therefore, when any one speaks to you at variance with Jesus Christ, who was descended from David, and was also of Mary; who was truly born, and did eat and drink. He was truly persecuted under Pontius Pilate; He was truly crucified, and [truly] died, in the sight of beings in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth. He was also truly raised from the dead, His Father quickening Him, even as after the same manner His Father will so raise up us who believe in Him by Christ Jesus, apart from whom we do not possess the true life.

But if, as some that are without God, that is, the unbelieving, say, that He only seemed to suffer (they themselves only seeming to exist), then why am I in bonds?

*Epistle to the Trallians*, chapter 9 and part of chapter 10

The first part of this passage is probably aimed at Gnostics; some Gnostic groups believed that Jesus was not a historical person, and that the events of Jesus ministry took place in a spiritual realm rather than the physical world. The later part of the passage has a more anti-Marcionite tone to it; the Marcionites accepted that Jesus came into the physical world, but (being docetic) they did not believe he has a physical body or experienced physical pain. A similar statement can be found in chapter 2 of the *Epistle to the Smyrnaeans* “not, as certain unbelievers maintain, that He only seemed to suffer, as they themselves only seem to be [Christians].” Then in chapter 9 he tells his readers to “give heed to the prophets”; it seems that the “heretics” that he opposes are both docetic, and reject the Hebrew Scriptures (i.e. the “Old Testament”) the Marcionites meet this description perfectly.

In chapter 5 of his epistle to the *Philadelphians*, Ignatius exhorts the reader to “love the prophets, because they too have proclaimed the Gospel” (see also chapter 9) once again this seems to imply that his opponents rejected the Hebrew Scriptures and claimed that they were incompatible with the gospel; we know that he is battling docetism in Philadelphia too as he emphasises the significance of Jesus’ flesh and blood in both

chapters 4 and 5 of the epistle to that community.

It is likely that Ignatius was combating a number of different “heretical” groups. We cannot prove that a well defined Marcionite movement were among them, but the tantalising hints that I have listed are well worth noting.

One of the epistles of Ignatius was addressed to Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrnaea. After receiving it Polycarp supposedly wrote a letter of his own, attached the epistles of Ignatius to it, and forwarded them to the Philippians’ (who had not yet received copies). Polycarp and Ignatius appear to have been close allies and working together to combat teachings different to their own. It is in Polycarp’s epistle that we find the strongest evidence that the Marcionites existed at that time:

“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.”

Polycarp’s *Epistle to the Philippians*, chapter 7.

The reference to someone denying that “Christ has come in the flesh” attacks docetic beliefs; denying the “testimony of the cross” refers to the Marcionite belief that Jesus did not suffer physical pain on the cross<sup>7</sup> (in contrast to Gnostics who believed that the entire crucifixion event took place outside the physical realm). “whosoever perverts the oracles” may refer to Marcion’s work entitled “*Antitheses*” (“*Contradictions*”), which placed statements from the Old Testament (ie from the “Oracles” or “prophets”) along side contradictory statements in the writings of Paul, in order to shown that the Gospel and the prophets were in opposition to one another. “and says that there is neither a resurrection nor a judgment”, Marcion did not believe in a physical resurrection of the dead at the end of time, rather he believed that a believer was spiritually resurrected at the moment of their conversion; Marcion also did not believe that God judged anyone. Finally notice the statement “he is the first-born of Satan”; these are the exact words with which (according to Irenaeus) Polycarp rejected Marcion in around 144AD, when he was excommunicated in Rome. Finally notice the phrase “let us return to the word which has been handed down to us from the beginning”; this could be interpreted as indicating that Polycarp’s opponents have a different version of the scripture, which Polycarp accuses them of corrupting (though that is not the only interpretation of the phrase).

There are four possible responses to this evidence:

- 1) To conclude that Marcionite (or perhaps proto-Marcionite) belief was already widespread in c115AD; contrary to the statements of Irenaeus, Clement and Tertullian.
- 2) To conclude that this epistle is fraudulent, and was actually written much later.

---

<sup>7</sup> Some translators interpret this phrase “his suffering on the cross” which makes the match even more precise.

- 3) To argue that this passage does not refer to Marcionite beliefs (contrary to the evidence I have illustrated).
- 4) To argue that chapter 7 was written at a later date to the rest of the epistle, and was somehow attached.

It makes very little difference to me whether or not the epistles of Polycarp and Ignatius are genuine or when they were written; I am only interested in whether or not they pre-date the existence of the Marcionites, so conclusions 1 and 2 amount to the same thing as far as I am concerned.

Some scholars have been reluctant to challenge the account of history written by Irenaeus and those who came after him, and so have opted for options 3 and 4 above. This strikes me as a little like trying to force a jigsaw piece into the wrong place. When our interpretation of the evidence is correct (when the pieces are in the right place) there is no need to skew the interpretation of anything to make it fit in with anything else; and so we should not allow the statements of the later Catholics to skew our interpretation of Polycarp, especially when their agenda encouraged them to distort the truth themselves.

In case there is anyone reading this, who is tempted by options 3 and 4 I will provide evidence that challenging Marcionite beliefs is a consistent theme throughout the whole of Polycarp's epistle. Throughout the author emphasises (1) that God, Jesus and the saints have a role in judgement, (2) the bodily resurrection of the dead (3) the validity of the Old Testament and (4) that Polycarp's own teaching is in accordance with that of Paul:

serve the Lord in fear... To Him [Jesus] **all things in heaven and on earth** are subject. Him **every spirit** serves. He comes as **the Judge** of the living and the dead. His **blood will God require** of those who do not believe in Him. But **He who raised Him up from the dead will raise up us also...** (chapter 2) walk in the **commandments** of the Lord... train up their children in the knowledge and **fear** of God. (chapter 4) walk worthy of His **commandment** and glory... If we please Him in this present world, we shall receive also the future world, according as He has promised to us that **He will raise us again from the dead** (chapter 5) **"we must all appear at the judgment-seat of Christ,** and must every one give an account of himself." 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 alike taught us]. Let us be zealous in the pursuit of that which is good, keeping ourselves from causes of offence, **from false brethren, and from those who in hypocrisy bear the name of the Lord...** (chapter 6) Jesus Christ, "who bore our sins in His own **body** on the tree," (chapter 8) to yield obedience to the word of righteousness, and to exercise all patience, such as ye have seen [set] before your eyes, not only in the case of the blessed Ignatius, and Zosimus, and Rufus, but also in others among yourselves, and in **Paul himself, and the rest of the apostles.** (chapter 9) But **who of us are ignorant of the judgment of the Lord?** "Do we not know that **the saints shall judge the world?**" as **Paul teaches.** But I have neither seen nor heard of any such thing among you, **in the midst of whom the blessed Paul laboured,** and who are commended in the beginning of his Epistle. (chapter 11) For I trust that ye are well versed in the **Sacred Scriptures,** and that nothing is hid from you; but to me this privilege is not yet granted. It is declared then in these Scriptures, "Be ye angry, and sin not," [from the

Hebrew bible, *Psalms* 4:4] and, “Let not the sun go down upon your wrath.” [From Paul’s epistles, *Ephesians* 4:26]... (chapter 12)

The implications of Polycarp’s heavy emphasis on these points are that his opponents (1) deny the judgement of God and Jesus, (2) deny the bodily resurrection of the dead, (3) deny the validity of the Hebrew scriptures, (4) Preach in the name of Paul, and possibly claim that Paul’s teaching was not in accord with the other apostles. Finally notice from chapter 6 that these people call themselves Christian, which rules out the possibility that he is arguing against Jewish or Pagan opponents. All of this matches Marcionite teaching perfectly on every single point.

If the epistles of Ignatius and Polycarp were written at a time when Marcionite<sup>8</sup> beliefs were already well established then, regardless of when they were written, they cannot be used as evidence that the Catholic version of the epistles of Paul pre-dates the Marcionite version or that Paul received widespread acceptance among Catholics before the time of Marcion.

## 7 Conclusions

When one sets aside the contradictory and highly biased accounts of Irenaeus, Clement of Alexander, Tertullian and Epiphanius, and focuses exclusively on the earlier sources of information, it becomes apparent that the account of history written for us by the later Catholics was inaccurate and biased; written with the intent of undermining the credibility of Marcion and his followers. We will never be able to establish the exact dates of Marcion’s life.

The account of history given to us by Irenaeus and those after him also claims that Marcion himself devised the beliefs of the Marcionites, and edited their scriptures; in reality is more likely that Marcion’s beliefs simply reflected the views of the community he came from, and that his bible simply consisted of the books that those Christians held in high regard.

There are very few (if any) Catholic writings that both pre-date Marcion, and indicate that their authors accepted the epistles of Paul as scripture. This explains why no early Catholics reacted or resisted when changes were first made to the epistles of Paul.

Thank you for taking the time to read this article. If you have any questions or comments please do not hesitate to contact me:

[Melissa@Marcionite-Scripture.info](mailto:Melissa@Marcionite-Scripture.info)

Written: 09/2009

Extensively revised: 08/2010

---

<sup>8</sup> Or perhaps proto-Marcionite