

# *III Corinthians as A Pseudepigraphic Refutation of Marcionism*

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## **Origin and Date of III Corinthians**

III Corinthians is an instructive Pauline pseudepigraph written in Greek around 150 A.D. or possibly somewhat later. At times it is incorporated in manuscripts of the Acts of Paul, composed, according to Tertullian, in the latter part of the second century by an unnamed presbyter of Asia Minor. III Corinthians also circulated independently of the Acts of Paul. Some scholars maintain that it was originally an integral part of this apocryphal Acts, but others, the majority, I believe, are of the opinion that it was composed independently of the Acts and was interpolated into the Acts, somewhat clumsily, later on.

Regardless of origin, III Corinthians was well-received in the early church; not only was it considered to be a genuine letter written by Paul himself, but in some areas of early Christianity it was accepted as canonical, as being a part of the New Testament, in fact. It was accepted in the Syrian and Armenian canons of the New Testament, and apparently in some Latin manuscripts of the New Testament as being canonical. Moreover, in those instances when the Acts of Paul was also considered to be canonical, III Corinthians, when included in the Acts, shared its canonicity.

## **Manuscript Evidence**

The Manuscript evidence for III Corinthians is conveniently summarized by A.F.J. Klijn in his article, "The Apocryphal Correspondence between Paul and the Corinthians," *Vigiliae Christianae*, XVIII (1963), pp.1 ff. But before

citing this evidence, it should be noted, that the fullest, but not necessarily the original, form of the apocryphal correspondence between Paul and the Corinthians is in four sections, which I designate as A, an introduction giving the purported historical situation which occasioned the correspondence; B, a purported letter from the Corinthians to Paul; C, an account of the delivery of this letter to the apostle who was in prison; and D, Paul's alleged reply. (Klijn does not list A, and enumerates B, C, and D as I, II, and III).

**Armenian:** There are at least eleven Armenian manuscripts which usually contain sections B, C, and D. However, one located in Smyrna does not contain all of B and D. The Armenian may be a translation of the Syriac, rather than of the original Greek.

**Syriac:** The Syriac, extant in an Armenian version of the Syriac of Ephrem's commentary on the Pauline letters, including III Corinthians, contains sections B, C, and D.

**Latin:** There are five Latin witnesses of the correspondence, manuscripts dating from the 10th to the 13th centuries, three of which, significantly enough, are Biblical manuscripts. It is noteworthy that the correspondence was included in Latin manuscripts of these relatively late dates. All five lack section A; one lacks section B (the letter to Paul); four lack section C (the reception of the letter to Paul); and one, which is fragmentary, just a few pages, has not preserved section D, Paul's reply.

**Coptic:** The Coptic version is extant only in fragments of a 6th century Coptic manuscript (the Heidelberg papyrus) of the Acts of Paul, published in C. Schmidt's *Acta Pauli*, Leipzig, 1904, pp. 73-78. It alone contains the introductory

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section A; it also has the other three sections, B, C, and D.

**Greek:** Finally, but certainly not least, the Greek text, completely separate from the Acts of Paul, is extant in the recently discovered and published Bodmer Papyrus X, dated as early as the 3rd century: (Michael Testuz, **Papyrus Bodmer X-XI**, Geneva, 1959). First, the Nativity of Mary is transcribed on pp. 1-49 of this early manuscript; the Corinthian correspondence (sections B and D only) begins on p. 50 and continues to the top of p. 57; the remainder of p. 57 through p. 61 contains the 11th Ode of the Odes of Solomon, heretofore extant in Syriac only.

This papyrus codex not only is the sole surviving Greek witness of the text of the Corinthian correspondence, but it is also the oldest manuscript containing III Corinthians by about three centuries. Furthermore, as was previously noted, it is presented neither as a part of the canonical Pauline letter collection nor as a part of the Acts of Paul. Moreover, it contains but two sections, B, the letter to "Paul," and D, his reply. It could well be that this earliest of the witnesses which is in the "original tongue" represents the original situation, namely, that III Corinthians was not initially included in the Acts of Paul, but was written independently of it, and that sections A and C were later additions.<sup>1</sup>

The correspondence is available in modern translations, German, French, and English. In so far as I am aware, the only translation of the newly found Greek text is the one in French in Testuz' edition of the Bodmer manuscript on the pages facing the transcription of the Greek. Accordingly, assisted by referring to this French translation, I am providing an English translation of the Greek.

<sup>1</sup> There are fragmentary Greek texts of the Acts of Paul (especially the Hamburg papyrus of about 300 A.D.), but none of these contains the Corinthian correspondence. See Edgar Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha*, Philadelphia, 1964, Vol. II, pp. 325-27 for the Greek and other texts of the Acts of Paul.

## Section A

But first of all, a summary of section A, the introduction provided in the Coptic text which has been translated by James, may be in order. Paul is represented as being in Macedonia (imprisoned in Philippi), when two men, Simon and Cleobius, arrived in Corinth and began to upset the Corinthians by their strange doctrines, stating: "There is no resurrection of the body, but of the spirit (only); and that the body is not the creation of God; and also concerning the world, that God did not create it, and that God knoweth not the world; and that Jesus Christ was not crucified, but was an appearance (i.e., but only in appearance); and that he was not born of Mary, nor of the seed of David." Accordingly, the Corinthians wrote a letter to Paul, section B, sending it by Threptus and Euty-chus:<sup>2</sup>

## Section B, from the Greek Text.

The Corinthians to Paul.

1—Stephanus and the presbyters who are with him — Daphnus and Euboulus and Xenon — to Paul, who is in the Lord, greeting!

2—Two men have come to Corinth, a certain Simon and Cleobius, who are perverting the faith of some by corrupt words, 3—which you shall put to the test, 4—because we have never heard such words from you nor from the others; 5—but what we have received from you and them we give heed to.

6—Since therefore the Lord has had mercy on us, that while you are still in the flesh we may hear again from you, 7—either come yourself (8—for we believe, as it has been revealed to Theone, that the Lord has delivered you from the hand of the Lawless One), or write to us.

9—For this is what they say and teach: 10—It is not necessary, they say to use the Prophets: 11—that God is not the Almighty; 12—that there is no resurrection

<sup>2</sup> This is from M. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, Oxford, 1924, p. 288.

of the flesh; 13—that the creation of man is not (the work) of God; 14—that the Lord is not come in the flesh, that he was not born of Mary; 15—that the world is not of God but of the angels.

16—Therefore, brother, make all speed to come here, so that the church of the Corinthians may remain without offense, and that the folly of these (men) may become evident. Farewell in the Lord!

### Section C

Section C, not found in the Greek text, relates the delivery of this letter to Paul in prison in Philippi. Paul's affliction was increased by the bad news that he had received; accordingly, he wrote a reply, section D, which follows in my English version of the Greek text. It does not contain verses 14, 22, 23, and 33 that are present in certain other MSS<sup>3</sup>. These verses are of no particular consequence. The letter reads:

Paul to the Corinthians.

Concerning the Flesh.

1—Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus, who is in many difficulties, to the brethren in Corinth, greeting! 2—I do not wonder that the doctrines of the Evil One progress so rapidly, 3—but the Lord Christ will bring his coming quickly, having been rejected by those who debased his words.

4—For from the beginning I have handed down to you what I received from the apostles who were before me, who at all times were with Jesus Christ: 5—That our Lord Jesus Christ was born of Mary, of the seed of David by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven by the Father unto her, 6—that he might come into the world and deliver all flesh by his own flesh, as he has shown himself (to be) an example; 7—and that man had been created by his Father; 8—therefore, when he was lost he was sought for, that he might be made alive by adoption.

9—For the God of everything, the Al-

<sup>3</sup> The versification is rather common to the various printed editions of III Corinthians.

mighty, who had made the heaven and the earth, sent, first of all, the prophets to the Jews, that they might be torn away from their sins; 10—for he had determined to save the house of Israel. Therefore, having divided the Spirit of Jesus, he sent (part of it) into the prophets who proclaimed the errorless worship many times.

11—(But the Prince of this world), desiring to be (God), laid his hands upon them (the prophets?) and bound the flesh of men for (his own) pleasure.

12—God the Almighty, since he is just, and not desiring to set aside his own creation, 13—sent the Spirit through fire unto Mary the Galilean, 15—in order that through the flesh, by whose destruction the Evil One ruled, he would become conquered and would realize that he was not God. 16—For by his own body Christ Jesus had saved all flesh, 17—that he might show forth a temple of righteousness in his own body, 18—by which we are set free.

19—For those are not children of justice but of wrath, those who reject the providence of God, saying that the heaven and the earth and all that are in them are not the works of the Father, 20—for they hold to the accursed faith of the Serpent. 21—Turn away from them and flee from their teaching.

24—As for those who say there is no resurrection of the flesh, for them there is no resurrection, 25—those who deny his (Jesus') resurrection.

26—For indeed, men of Corinth, they do not understand the sowing of wheat or other seeds that you cast naked upon the earth, and are decayed beneath, that they are raised by the will of God in a body and clothed. 27—Thus not only was the body which was cast (into the earth) raised up, but (it is) much blessed.

28—If we do not wish to use the parable of the seeds, 29—you know that Jonah, the son of Amathios (Amittai), when he would not preach to Nineveh,

was swallowed by a sea monster; 30—and, after three days and three nights God heard the prayer of Jonah from the depths of Hades, and no part of him was harmed, not even a hair or an eyelash. 31—How much more, you of little faith, will he raise you up, who believe in Jesus Christ, as he himself was raised up?

32—And if, when a corpse was thrown upon the bones of the prophet Elisha by the sons of Israel, and the body of the man was raised up, so you also, upon whom the body, and the bones, and the Spirit of Christ have been let down, will be raised in that last day having your own flesh.

34—If, then, you have received any other (teachings) do not cause me any more trouble. 35—For I have these bonds upon my hands that I might gain Christ, and the marks upon my body that I might attain unto the resurrection from the dead.

36—And if anyone abides by the rule which he received from the prophets and the holy Gospel, he shall receive a reward.

37—But if anyone transgresses these things, the fire is with him and with those who go before him in the way, 38—men without God, who are a generation of vipers. 39—Guard yourselves from them by the power of the Lord.

40—And let my peace be with you.

#### **Brief Textual Observations**

The Greek text of the two letters differs in a number of details from the texts of the various versions. It could be that one or more of the verses not in the Greek papyrus are textual errors of omission rather than later additions. But it should be noted that the texts of the various versions differ among themselves. Indeed, as might be expected, there are textual variants within the Latin manuscripts alone. As Schneemelcher has observed: "The texts of the various witnesses vary considerably, so that a reconstitution of the text is extremely

difficult, if not indeed impossible."<sup>4</sup> With reference to details this may be a valid evaluation. However, in so far as the basic features of the two letters, sections B and D, are concerned, there are no significant divergences.

As previously stated, sections A and C, the introductory setting and the delivery of the Corinthian letter to Paul, may have been later narrative interpolations, designed to provide a plausible setting for the correspondence. Their absence from a number of the manuscripts of the versions may lend credibility to this assumption. On the other hand, they may have been in the original Greek copy of the correspondence itself, and were omitted in later Greek manuscripts, including the Bodmer papyrus. In either case, these two sections tell us nothing about the purported false teachings that is not in the two letters, sections B and D, themselves.

#### **Pseudepigraphy**

The techniques of pseudepigraphy vary from the very simple and obvious to the complex and somewhat convincing. A writing may, for example, be ascribed to a person other than its true author by title alone, as, for example, the Gospel of Matthew. Or, a writing may be falsely included in the genuine composition of a known writer, as is true of Isaiah 24-27 which is generally conceded to be an unauthentic interpolation into the body of Isaiah (not to mention second Isaiah). Again, it might consist of merely ascribing authorship to some one other than the actual author within the body of a given work, as in the beginning of I Peter: "Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus, etc." In addition to this bare ascription there may be an attempt to add details to substantiate the false ascription. For example, within II Peter not only is this work attributed to Peter, but there is an attempt to substantiate this ascription by having the author state that he was an eyewitness of the

<sup>4</sup> *New Testament Apocrypha*, ed. by Edgar Hennecke, Philadelphia, 1964, Vol. II, p. 327.

transfiguration of Jesus. If you should happen to question the historicity of this theophany its use for proof becomes disproof! Another technique, which is exceedingly difficult to use, is to imitate the vocabulary, style, and thought of an author as these may be found in his authentic writings. This, conceivably, was done by the author of Ephesians, if Goodspeed's theory of Ephesians is tenable. Some years back, in an article for the *Journal of Religion*, January, 1942, entitled "Pseudepigraphic Refutations of Marcionism," I attempted to show that the Pastoral Epistles were complex, ingenious pseudepigraphs of this last type which even to-day are accepted by many as being genuinely Pauline. In this article I also called attention briefly to III Corinthians among other early Christian pseudepigraphs.

Certainly, pseudepigraphy has a long if not exactly an honorable history, having been practiced by the Jews, both of Palestine and of the Diaspora, by the Greeks, by the Romans, and by the Christians in its various forms and for various reasons. Its practice has continued down to the present day, and no doubt will persist far down the future.

#### **Sections A, B, and C and Pseudepigraphy**

Apparently, sections A and C, the introductory setting and the reception of the Corinthian letter by Paul, reflect some efforts to provide verisimilitude. This is mainly accorded by depicting Paul as a prisoner in Philippi, which may be a reflection of the account of Paul's imprisonment in Philippi related in Acts 16:22-24. If one of the false teachers, Simon, is to be identified with Simon Magus of Acts, his associations were with Philip, Peter, and John, not with Paul. There is no mention of any Cleobius in the New Testament. Threptus, allegedly one of the bearers of the letter to Paul, is also unmentioned in the New Testament. A certain Eutychus is named in Acts 20:7-12 as the youth who fell out of a window while Paul talked, but this is said to have occurred in Troas, not in

Corinth. In other words, the attempts at plausibility in sections A and C are anything but convincing. Some degree of plausibility might have been added had Apollos, who had caused Paul some difficulty in Corinth according to I Corinthians, 1:12, been represented as the false teacher.

#### **Section B: The Corinthian Letter to Paul.**

It might be noted that the address in this letter to Paul follows the customary Greek epistolary form: the writer or writers to the recipient, and the word "greeting" (*chairein*). Stephanus, who with his household is said by Paul to have been the first convert in Achaia (I Corinthians 16:15) is listed first among the authors of the letter. But the verisimilitude is immediately weakened, because the four others who are mentioned, Daphnus, Euboulus, Theophilus, and Xenon are not named in the genuine correspondence of Paul with the church at Corinth. Euboulus is included in the concluding greetings in II Timothy 4:21, but with no discernible connection with Corinth. A certain Theophilus is addressed in Luke 1:3 and Acts 1:1, but there is no indication that he was either a Corinthian or a Pauline convert. Neither Daphnus nor Xenon is mentioned in any connection in the New Testament. A pseudepigrapher, seeking the appearance of authenticity might better have given Fortunatus and Achaicus as co-authors with Stephanus, for the three are named conjointly in I Corinthians 16:17: "I rejoice at the coming of Stephanus and Fortunatus and Achaicus, for they have made up your absence." Actually, there is nothing in the letter to indicate a Corinthian origin, save for the statement in vs. 2, "Two men have come to Corinth," and a second reference in vs. 16, "the church of the Corinthians."

#### **Section D: Paul's Reply to the Corinthians.**

The opening address in the letter by "Paul" to the church at Corinth is un-Pauline both by its brevity and its con-

tents: "Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus, to the brethren in Corinth, greeting (chairein)." To be sure, Philemon begins in a somewhat similar fashion: "Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus and Timothy our brother, to Philemon, etc." but this address contains the familiar Pauline phraseology, "grace (charis, not chairein) and peace, etc." The Pastorals do better, having both "grace" and "peace" in the addresses.

The pseudepigrapher might have given his letter a somewhat more authentic appearance by including the normal Pauline thanksgiving, which is even present in Philemon, brief as it is: "I thank my God always, etc." There are no thanksgivings in I Timothy and Titus, but II Timothy 1:3 begins: "I thank God, whom I serve, etc." (It might be noted in passing that there is no thanksgiving in Galatians). Paul's genuine letters, save for Romans, conclude with some reference to "grace," as in I Corinthians 16:23: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you." The Pastorals conclude in a similar manner. III Corinthians ends somewhat differently: "And let my peace be with you," possibly reminiscent of Romans 15:33: "Now the God of peace be with you all, Amen," which may have been the original conclusion of Romans if chapter 16 is considered to be an addendum. Moreover, normally Paul's letters have salutations of varying length in the conclusion. This is also true of the Pastorals. However, there is no salutation in the concluding section of III Corinthians. Accordingly, in so far as the address, the thanksgiving, the concluding salutation, and the word of grace are concerned, the pseudepigrapher has failed to include these Pauline features in his composition.

As was stated above, a skilful pseudepigrapher will endeavor to imitate the language, style, and thought of the writer whose name he is using, which seemingly is illustrated by Ephesians. The author(s) of the Pastorals had somewhat less ability in imitating Paul. The author of III Corinthians quite evidently did little to reproduce Paul's vocabulary

and style, but there are some more or less evident reflections of Paul's usage in his pseudepigraph, as the following examples indicate.

I have already called attention to the close similarity of vs. 1, "Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus," to Philemon 1, "Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus." Vs. 4, "For from the beginning I have handed down to you what I have received from the apostles who were before me," closely resembles I Corinthians 15:3, "For I handed down to you as of first importance what I also received," save for the statement in III Corinthians that Paul was dependent upon the apostles for his teachings, an admission that Paul himself would never have admitted. However, this is in keeping with the efforts made in Acts and other sources to show that Paul and the Twelve were in substantial agreement. A striking example is given in the 2d century Epistle of the Apostles, 31. The resurrected Jesus tells the disciples about Paul predicting that he will be a persecutor, that he will be converted, and will become a preacher unto the Gentiles. He urges them to receive Paul and to "instruct" him.

Vs. 5, "our Lord Jesus Christ was born of Mary of the seed of David," might possibly reflect Romans 1:3, "who was descended from David according to the flesh," but this is probably dubious, for when Paul might have done so, neither here nor in Galatians 4, "born of woman,"<sup>55</sup> does Paul mention Mary. Incidentally, III Corinthians does not use the term "virgin Mary," neither in vs. 5 nor in vs. 13, "Mary the Galilean."

The possibility of dependence upon Paul is apparently clearer in vs. 7, "therefore, when he (man) was lost, he was sought for, that he might be made alive through adoption," which may be compared with Paul's doctrine of adoption which is stated in Galatians 5:4, "so that we might have adoption as sons."

Vs. 11, which is somewhat fragmentary in the papyrus, may be reconstructed with the aid of the versions as follows: "(But the Prince of this world), desiring

to be (God), laid hands upon them and bound all the flesh of men for his own pleasure." This may be compared with II Thessalonians 2:3-4 (which the pseudepigrapher would have regarded as Pauline): "and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God."

Vs. 19 has the phrase "children of wrath," as does Ephesians 2:3, its only appearance in the New Testament. A somewhat similar phrase, "sons of disobedience," is found in vs. 22 of the Armenian text and of the Latin MSS. M,P, and B, but it is not in the Coptic, Syriac, or Greek texts. However it does appear in Ephesians 2:2 and 5:6 and in Colossians 3:6, the only occurrences of this phrase in the New Testament. Conceivably the author of III Corinthians with Ephesians 2:2-3 before him, used both terms, "children of wrath" and "sons of disobedience, and in the course of transmission "sons of disobedience" dropped out of some texts, including that of the Bodmer papyrus.

The figure in vs. 26 of the seed which is cast into the ground and decays, only to live again, may reflect Paul's use of this figure in I Corinthians 15:37-38. Vs. 26 reads: "For indeed, men of Corinth, they do not understand the sowing of wheat or other seeds that you cast naked upon the earth, and are decayed beneath, that they are raised by the will of God in a body and clothed." Paul himself wrote: "And what you sow is not the body which is to be, but a naked kernel, perhaps of wheat or some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has willed, and to each kind of seed it's own body." The borrowing is the more evident when the Greek words of the two texts are compared.

Vss. 34-36 read: "If, then, you have received any other (teachings) do not cause me any more trouble. For I have these bonds upon my hands that I may gain Christ and the marks (stigmata)

upon my body that I might attain unto the resurrection from the dead. And if anyone abides by the rule which he has received from the Prophets and the holy Gospel, he will receive a reward." This passage is apparently a conflation or melange of Galatians 6:17a; Philippians 3:8; Galatians 6:17b; Philippians 3:11; Galatians 6:16; and possibly I Corinthians 3:14.

Galatians 6:17a reads: "Henceforth let no man trouble me." Philippians 3:8 states: "For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and counted them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ." Again, in Galatians 6:17b we have: "for I bear on my body the marks (stigmata) of Jesus." Turning to Philippians 3:11 we find: "that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead." Next, Galatians 6:16 states: "Peace and mercy upon all who walk by this rule, upon the Israel of God." Finally, in I Corinthians 3:14 we read: "he will receive a reward." This conflation of proof texts from Paul is similar to the Christian conflations of proof texts from the Old Testament, which Rendel Harris called attention to and termed "testimonies."

On the basis of the comparisons presented above it seems to be evident that the author of III Corinthians had some acquaintance with Paul's letters. However, it appears to be unlikely that his indistinct echoes of Paul's words were designed to give his composition an appearance of authenticity. If he used them for this purpose he was not very convincing. To be sure, many early Christians accepted III Corinthians as authentic, but more likely because it claimed to be by Paul, and not by reason of the author's skill as an imitator of Paul's letters. To us of this modern period it is a palpable pseudepigraphic composition.

Wholly apart from the Pastorals and possibly Ephesians and II Thessalonians, there were still other forged letters written in Paul's name. There is, of course, the alleged correspondence between Paul and Seneca, which was apparently accepted by many, including scholars like

Augustine and Jerome, as being authentic, despite its obvious transparency as a forgery. The writer of the so-called Muratorian Canon, composed about 200 A.D. in Rome, referred to two letters ascribed to Paul, one to the Laodiceans, the other to the Alexandrians, as being spurious. He wrote: "There is also extant an epistle to the Laodiceans and another to the Alexandrians which are forged under the name of Paul for the heresy of Marcion," that is, to support Marcionism in Paul's name. The letter to the Alexandrians has disappeared; this is probably true of the one to the Laodiceans, for the one by this name that is extant to-day is so devoid of doctrine of any kind that it is difficult to believe that it is the one referred to in the Muratorian Canon. Indeed, with the ascendancy of the Catholic Church the documents supporting Marcionism, save as they were cited by writers refuting this doctrine, disappeared. It is significant, however, that followers of Marcion forged letters in Paul's name to defend Marcionism. Marcion, as we know, claimed Pauline support for his doctrines. Since but very little in Paul's letters could be used in this way, it was but natural that the Marcionites artfully composed letters in Paul's name to gain apostolic authority for their doctrines. Conversely, opponents of Marcionism prepared documents in the name of Paul as apostolic refutations of Gnosticism. This, as I stated in the article referred to above, was the main purpose of the Pastorals. Indeed, when it is realized that Marcion's views were presented in his *Antitheses*, it is obvious that the conclusion of I Timothy, if the Greek is translated literally, is a warning against Marcionism: "O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you. Avoid the godless chatter and Antitheses of what is falsely called gnosis, for by professing it some have fished the mark as regards the faith."

#### **The Purpose of III Corinthians.**

Next, we may ask, "Why was III Corinthians written?" The answer is rather

obvious. At a time when so-called heretics were using Paul's name to support their teachings and practices, even composing letters to do so, our author ingeniously wrote a letter in Paul's name to refute what he considered to be evil heretical teachings.

What heresy or heresies were being attacked? That of Bardaisan has been suggested. But he was a mere child at the time III Corinthians was presumably written (born about 154 A.D.). Another suggestion is that the heresy is that of Simon Magus, possibly because a certain Simon is stated in III Corinthians to have been one of the false teachers. Klijn, who favors Simon Magus, writes in the article previously referred to, pp. 22-23: "... we are not able to say that the correspondence was written against any particular kind of heresy. The correspondence probably describes a tendency in the early church ... we can only say that the tendency is not yet 'doctrine' which can be found in the well known gnostic systems."

In my article on "Pseudepigraphic Refutations of Marcionism" I concluded that III Corinthians was directed against the views of Marcion, with a modification made by his disciple Apelles, namely the angelic creation of the world of matter instead of its creation by a Demiurge, as Marcion proposed. On reviewing the evidence, I still maintain this conclusion.

#### **Summary of Marcionite Beliefs.**

Accordingly, first of all it is in order to present a summary of Marcionite doctrines. Marcion taught: 1) That God the father was not the creator and ruler of the universe and of man, but that the creator was a separate and lower "deity," the Demiurge or artificer. 2) That Jesus Christ was not the son of the creator god but of God the Father. 3) That Jesus was not truly incarnate, did not truly suffer on the cross, die, rise in the flesh, and ascend into heaven. 4) That there will be no resurrection of the flesh of man. 5) That neither God the Father, the God of love and mercy, not of justice, nor his



son Jesus Christ will ever judge anybody. 6) That the Scripture of the Jews (i.e., which Christians came to call the Old Testament) is to be rejected, since it is the revelation of the creator god, the Demiurge, the god of the Jews, not that of God the Father, the God of the Christians, and also, as he attempted to show in his *Antitheses*, because it contradicts the Gospel. Marcion also taught abstention from marriage, meat, and wine, but with reference to III Corinthians this is not relevant. It should be noted, again, that his disciple, Apelles, taught that the world was created by a fiery angel, not by the Demiurge. These are the basic doctrines of Marcionism. As A. C. McGiffert demonstrated in his book, *The Apostles' Creed*, the fundamental tenets of Marcionism are refuted in the Apostles' Creed by the technique of affirming the beliefs of the opponents of Marcionism.<sup>5</sup> This same technique is used in III Corinthians, as we shall see.

#### **The Refutation of Marcionism in III Corinthians.**

The false teachings that are mentioned and refuted in this apocryphal Corinthian correspondence are precisely those of the Marcionites listed above, and, quite significantly, no other false doctrines of any other heretical sect are referred to. This would seem to indicate that Marcionism was the one and only target of the author.

First of all, the false teachers were reputed to have said that the world and mankind were not created by God the Father, and that he was not the ruler of the world. "Paul" replies that it was God the Father, the God of "everything," who had "made the heaven and the earth." Also, he states that "man had been created by his (i.e., Jesus') Father." This creator God the Father is also the Pantocrator, the Almighty, the all powerful, the ruler of everything. That is, contrary to Marcionite teachings, the Creator and the Father are one and the same God.

<sup>5</sup> A. C. McGiffert, *The Apostles' Creed*, Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1902, pp. 106 ff.

Those who deny this are children of wrath, who hold to "the accursed faith of the Serpent."

Secondly, Christ is definitely the Son of the Father. Indeed, it was the Father God who sent the Holy Spirit unto Mary. In the third place, Christ Jesus was truly incarnate, "born of Mary of the seed of David," to "Mary the Galilean," that he might redeem all flesh "by his flesh." There is no mention of the crucifixion, but this event and his death are implied by the belief in his resurrection in the flesh. Since he was incarnate, again by implication, he would have truly suffered on the cross. Since he is to "come quickly," i.e., from heaven in his second advent, Jesus' ascension is also assumed.

As for the fourth Marcionite doctrine, the denial of the fleshly resurrection of mankind, the resurrection of the flesh is emphasized in "Paul's" letter, which is entitled, "Concerning the Flesh" in the Greek text. Indeed, Jesus is an example of the resurrection "from the dead in the flesh," and "by his body he had saved all flesh." The use of the figure of the seed cast into the ground, of the dead man restored by touching the bones of Elisha, and of the account of Jonah restored from the depths of Hades, reinforces the doctrine of the resurrection of the flesh.

In considering the fifth teaching of Marcionism as listed above, that neither God the Father, the God of love and mercy, nor his son, Christ Jesus, will ever judge anybody, this is not specifically attributed to the heretics who allegedly upset the Corinthians. However, this doctrine denying the judgment may be imputed to them by the statement in the letter by "Paul" that God the Father is "just." Furthermore, that there is to be a judgment, contrary to the views of Marcionism, is indicated by the warning that if anyone transgresses the true teachings of "Paul" the "fire is with him," presumably the eternal fire of hell for the wicked; whereas he who abides by the "rule," i.e., the true teachings as outlined in the letter, will receive a reward, probably a heavenly reward is meant.

Taking up the sixth doctrine of the Marcionites, that the Scriptures of the Jews are to be rejected, "Paul" does not accept this tenet, for, as noted above, he cites stories about Jonah and Elisha as proofs of the resurrection. Moreover, not only did God the Creator and Father send the prophets to the Jews, but he also inspired them with part of the Spirit of Jesus, a strange doctrine, but one which ties the Jewish Scriptures and the Gospel together. Indeed, this is stated explicitly, for the correct "rule" which must be observed is found both in "the Prophets" (i.e., the Jewish Scriptures) and "the holy Gospel." That is, contrary to Marcionism, not only are the Jewish Scriptures inspired by God the Father, but they are also in harmony with the Gospel; there are no contradictions, no "antitheses." In fact, instead of the Prophets being the followers of the Demiurge, the statement in vs. 11 that the Prince of the world killed "them" (probably the Prophets are meant) indicates that they have no relationship to him.

It would appear, therefore that III Corinthians is directed in Paul's name against Marcionism, possibly as modified by Apelles, the best organized and the most aggressive "heresy" during the latter part of the second century when this work apparently was composed as a letter by Paul. To be sure, the letter to "Paul" states that the false teachers maintained that the world was created by "angels," not by a single "angel" as Apelles taught, but this would seem to be a minor discrepancy, not sufficient by itself to justify Klijn's objection that the correspondence was not a refutation of some form of Marcionism. The letter by "Paul" seems to imply creation by a Demiurge. Some one might ask: "Why did the correspondence fail to mention

Marcionism specifically? The answer to this question is evident, for such a reference would be so obvious an anachronism that scarcely any reader would have accepted III Corinthians as a Pauline letter. To be sure, I Timothy does refer to the "antitheses," but this is somewhat ambiguous, for the reader could have taken this to mean simply "contradictions," rather than the title of Marcion's book.

### Conclusion

III Corinthians is a poor example of pseudepigraphy, for we moderns, at least, can readily recognize it as a forgery written in Paul's name. Despite its inadequacies, it apparently was widely accepted in the early church. One evidence of this acceptance was its translation into Coptic, Syriac, Armenian, and Latin. Indeed, it even attained the status of canonicity in some areas of the church. The discovery of the Greek text has added interest to the study of this ancient document. It is conceivable that it was a valuable instrument in helping to refute Marcionism, which by its organization and teachings was a dire threat to that branch of early Christianity which came to be known as the Catholic Church by the end of the second century. Its pretensions that the teachings ascribed to Paul, who had been claimed by the Marcionites, which refute the basic doctrines of Marcionism are reinforced by the claim that these are also the true teachings of the apostles before him. This claim no doubt added to its effectiveness in a time when there was an increasing reliance upon the apostolic tradition for substantiating doctrines, the succession of the clergy, church organization, liturgy, and the contents of the New Testament itself.

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