

HEROES AND HERETICS:
An 8-Week Course on Early Church History

WEEK 2 **January 17, 2016**
Teacher: **Pastor Grisham**

The Apostolic Fathers:

- **Clement of Rome** (d. 99)
2nd, 3rd, or 4th Bishop of Rome (following the **Apostle Peter** and possibly Linus and Cletus)
Emphasized respect for the ordained officers and for regular processes; first among equals
Banished, then martyred by drowning in the Black Sea
- **Ignatius of Antioch** (c. 35-110)
3rd Bishop of Antioch (following the **Apostle Peter** and Evodius)
Emphasized the authority of the bishops and was the first to speak of the “Catholic Church”
Martyred in Rome, at the Colosseum
“I am writing to all the Churches and I enjoin all, that I am dying willingly for God's sake, if only you do not prevent it. I beg you, do not do me an untimely kindness. Allow me to be eaten by the beasts, which are my way of reaching to God. I am God's wheat, and I am to be ground by the teeth of wild beasts, so that I may become the pure bread of Christ.”
- **Polycarp** (c. 69-155)
Bishop of Smyrna
Emphasized continuity with the Apostolic teaching (having been a disciple of the **Apostle John**)
Martyred for refusing to burn incense to the Roman Emperor
“Eighty and six years I have served Him, and He has done me no wrong. How then can I blaspheme my King and Savior? You threaten me with a fire that burns for a season, and after a little while is quenched; but you are ignorant of the fire of everlasting punishment that is prepared for the wicked. I bless you Father for judging me worthy of this hour, so that in the company of the martyrs I may share the cup of Christ.”

Heresies in the Early Church:

Heresies arose at this early stage of church history when believers grappled with the difficult question of the relationship of Jesus to God (and then, by extension, of Jesus to the God of the Old Testament). First, we see that two equal and opposite errors came about from people seeking to defend the integrity of the one divine nature from the “contamination” and “confusion” that they felt would have to come about in any talk of bodily incarnation.

Docetism (from the Greek words *dokein* (to seem) and *dokesis* (apparition, phantom) held that the human form of the Christ was essentially an illusion. This was the first heresy, and it came in two varieties:

1. **Jewish Docetism**, according to which God’s nature is such (i.e., One, transcendent, invisible, etc.) that Jesus could not have been God, but only appeared, or was adopted as such for a time
2. **Marcionite Docetism**, according to which Christ was so divine he could not have been human; therefore, Jesus only appeared to be a flesh-and-blood man

Jewish Christians and the Ebionite Heresy (i.e., Jewish Docetism):

- **Simeon of Jerusalem** (d. 107)

2nd Bishop of Jerusalem (62-107)

The son of **Clopas** and cousin of **James** the brother of the Lord, whom he succeeded as bishop

Fled with most of the Jewish Christians to Pella during the Jewish War (66-70)

Crucified in Jerusalem

- **Ebionites** (the “poor ones”)
 1. Jewish Christians who saw Jesus as the Jewish Messiah but rejected his divinity.
 2. They insisted on following Jewish laws and rites.
 3. They revered **James the Just**, and rejected the **Apostle Paul** as an apostate from the Law.
 4. They used only the Aramaic “Gospel of the Hebrews” (possibly an early version of **Matthew**, with the chapters concerning Jesus’ nativity deleted.
** (Note that a later group of Ebionites emphasized a different understanding of Jesus, i.e., that he was a great archangel who was incarnated as Jesus and adopted as the Son of God)

In short, **the Jewish heresy** with regard to Christ consisted in its refusing to countenance the biblical view of the incarnation and in thereby **denying Christ his divinity**, relegating him, depending on the school, either the merely human Messiah of Israel, or an incarnate archangel – great, to be sure, but still a creature, and not in any sense the divine Son of God. Thus:

<u>Word</u>	Refused to accept any NT Scripture but Aramaic Matthew and James (no Paul)
<u>God</u>	Refused to countenance Christ’s own revelation of God as Triune
<u>Christ</u>	Denied Christ’s divinity (either the merely human Messiah or an incarnate angel)
<u>Salvation</u>	Insisted on excessive continuity with OT forms and practices

Marcion and the Marcionite Heresy (i.e., Marcionite, or Gentile, Docetism):

- **Marcion of Sinope** (85-160)
Native of Pontus, possibly a ship-master, who went to Rome and developed a doctrine that emphasized a radical discontinuity between the Old and New Testaments. His teachings were condemned in 144, but he then returned to Asia Minor and set up what was in effect a widespread and very successful rival to the proto-orthodox/catholic church, with its own strong ecclesiastical organization. His adoption of a truncated canon of Scripture (consisting only of eleven books, the *Evangelikon* (a modified version of Luke) and the *Apostolikon* (ten of the Pauline Epistles)) brought on a crisis of authority that ultimately led, interestingly enough, to the codification by the orthodox church of its canon (i.e., ours). His schismatic church continued in the West for 300 years, and in the East for some centuries longer. Marcion’s heresy has been described as “perhaps the most dangerous foe Christianity has ever known.”

In many ways, his heresy was exactly the opposite of the Ebionites. Specifically:

1. He saw Jesus as the fully divine Savior who came to reveal the Unknown God, his Father.
2. He insisted on totally rejecting Jewish influence, laws, rites, even its Scriptures – even its God! He rejected YHWH as a lesser god, a tribal deity of the Jews unworthy of “the Father.”
3. He viewed **Paul** as Jesus’ true Apostle, sent to save the church from those who would return it to a form of Judaism, and he received Paul’s ten letters (minus the Pastorals) as Scripture, rejecting other Epistles, especially **James**, as the legalistic work of Judaizers.
4. He rejected the other Gospels, using only a modified version of **Luke**, with the chapters concerning Jesus’ nativity deleted.

In short, **Marcion’s heresy** with regard to Christ consisted in his refusing to countenance the biblical view of the incarnation and in thereby **denying Christ his humanity**. Even more radical was his total breach between the Old and New Testaments, which went so far as to cultivate a sort of ditheism – that is, there were two gods, a higher transcendent one and a lower one who created the world (to whom he referred as the Demiurge). This primitive tribal god of the Jews was not evil, but was simply not worthy of

continued worship in the light of the salvation and revelation brought by Jesus; he was wrathful, vengeful, and legalistic. His queries of Adam in the Garden (“Where are you?”) were held to prove his lack of omniscience. Jesus, on the other hand, revealed the Wholly Unknown God, his Father, and showed the way of love, freeing us from the law, and more, ultimately freeing us from the restraints of matter to which YHWH had bound us.

This deep aversion to materiality shows Marcion’s affinity for what was already then coming into clearer expression as Gnosticism.¹ Like the Gnostics, he abhorred the materiality so evident in the Jewish religious thought and sought to expunge its influence from Christianity – thus, he understood the Incarnation in a Docetic manner, seeing Jesus’ body as only an imitation of a material body (using the example of the angels who visited Abraham in Genesis 18); He denied Jesus’ physical and bodily birth, death, and resurrection; and he denied the hope of our bodily resurrection. Unlike later Gnostics, however, who saw salvation as consisting in a turning away from the illusions of the physical work and emphasizing the mystical oneness between one’s inner “divine spark” with the divine source; Marcion held that the Heavenly Father was the wholly alien God, who had no connection with this world. Salvation thus consisted in the receiving of the salvation brought by Christ alone.

<u>Word</u>	Refused to accept any NT Scripture but Luke and Paul (no James).
<u>God</u>	Insisted on a ditheism, in which YHWH is a lesser tribal God, wholly different from the Heavenly Father whom Jesus came to reveal.
<u>Christ</u>	Denied Christ’s humanity (including his physical birth, death, and resurrection).
<u>Salvation</u>	Insisting on excessive discontinuity with the OT.
<u>Last Things</u>	Denied Christ’s physical Second Coming, as judgment was unworthy of the loving God; rather, those who reject him would be left to the Demiurge, who would cast them into the everlasting fire.

Montanism (or the New Prophecy):

- Montanism (the New Prophecy), founded by Montanus in Phrygia. Around the same time (mid-2nd century) as Marcion, Montanus came to believe that he was a prophet of God and that the *Paraclete* was speaking through him. He declared the town of Pepuza the site of the New Jerusalem. He had two female colleagues who prophesied with him: Priscilla and Maximilla. “The Three” spoke in ecstatic visions, encouraging followers to fast and pray to share in these revelations. They claimed to be part of a line of prophetic succession going back to **Agabus** (Acts 11:27-28 and 21:10-12) and the daughters of **Philip the Evangelist** (Acts 21:8-9). The New Prophecy spread from there to Gaul and to Africa. It was condemned in 177 at a synod, but continued to spread its influence. By the time of Augustine, however, the sect had dwindled to a shadow of its former influence and was reconciled to the church. And in the early 500’s, John of Ephesus, per the orders of Justinian, led an expedition to destroy the Montanist shrine in Pepuza, where the tombs of the Three were located.
- **Tertullian of Carthage (155-240)**

¹ Gnostic doctrine taught that the world was created and ruled by a lesser divinity, the demiurge, and that Christ was an emissary of the remote supreme divine being, esoteric knowledge (gnosis) of whom enabled the redemption of the human spirit. In this regard, Gnostics cultivated an intense disdain for materiality, for the rites and forms of “material” religion, or for literalism in biblical interpretation. The creator God was seen to be a lesser deity, if not evil, in ensnaring our souls, with their divine spark, in these cages of flesh; the serpent was revered as the liberator from the initial conditions of ignorance; and Christ was celebrated as the one who brought knowledge of the true salvation – release from the world and its pressing illusion – through the rejoining of our divine spark with the transcendent divine source. Sometimes the Gnostic worldview could issue in a de-linking of ethics from salvation, with a consequent antinomian libertinism. But more often, the Gnostic worldview, with its thoroughgoing disdain for the flesh, was more rigorous than the orthodox church, not being favorable to marriage or remarriage.

Tertullian, the best-known defender of the New Prophecy, aligned himself with the movement starting around 207. He admired the movement’s discipline and ascetic standards. In Carthage, while they avoided outright schism, the Montanists permitted women to prophesy there. Prophecy was considered a genuine gift, to be test by a council of elders to determine whether something was genuine revelation.

Called “the father of Latin Christianity,” alas, Tertullian himself was somewhat heretical, given his embrace of the New Prophecy – and in particular of his insistence that one could not be remarried, even if one’s spouse had died. He was the first to use the term “Trinity.” He was a convert, and insisted that conversion (a conscious breach, a radical act) was necessary. “Christians are made,” he declared, “not born.” He is also the source of other famous quotes: “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church,” and “What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?” Finally, he was a premillennialist, believing with the other Montanists that Jesus’ Second Coming was imminent. He wrote polemical books against Marcion and other heresies.

The problem with the New Prophecy proponents was one of authority: since they claimed that their revelation came from the Holy Spirit, then it could be claimed to supersede the authority of the bishops, even drawing equal to the Scripture. They were particularly influenced by Johannine literature (i.e., the Gospel of **John** and its emphasis on the Paraclete; and Revelation, with its vision of the New Jerusalem and its expectation of the immanence of Christ’s Second Coming. Like the Gnostics they otherwise claimed to opposed, Montanists ended up dividing the church into “inside-track” Christians (themselves, the *spiritales*, “spiritual people”) and the rest of the pack (the *psychici*, “carnal, natural people”).

Apparently, what most bothered people about the New Prophecy were its showy, attention-getting antics. Eusebius writes that Montanus “became beside himself, and being suddenly in a sort of frenzy and ecstasy, he raved, and began to babble and utter strange things, prophesying in a manner contrary to the constant custom of the Church handed down by tradition from the beginning.” This was seen to resemble more a possession than a regular prophecy; they were seen by many, therefore, as false prophets, because they acted irrationally and out of control.

Thus, in summary:

<u>Catholicism</u>	Antioch, Smyrna, Rome	Mark; Peter	Authority of bishops
<u>Ebionitism</u>	Jerusalem	Aramaic Matthew; James	Continuity with OT
<u>Marcionism</u>	Asia Minor, Rome	Modified Luke; Paul	Discontinuity with OT
<u>Montanism</u>	Phrygia, Carthage	John; Revelation	Authority of prophets