

Readings in the History of Christian Theology

Volume 1
Revised Edition

*From Its Beginnings to
the Eve of the Reformation*

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and
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Editors

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Preface to the Second Edition

It is a pleasure to help bring this valuable resource up-to-date and into the hands of a new generation of people learning about the history of Christian theology. William Placher was an expert at inviting readers and especially students into a conversation that had deep roots and an expansive future. The variety of voices included in these volumes of primary texts keeps the conversation going. This new edition sees the addition of many new texts, especially those from the voices of women and others who have been marginalized from the theological tradition. I hope that they can be fully incorporated into our teaching of theology and make us more aware of contemporary voices that are silenced.

I am grateful to Westminster John Knox Press and Wabash College for inviting me to assist in this second edition of Bill's books. I revised and fully updated his earlier *A History of Christian Theology* (Westminster John Knox Press, 1983; 2nd ed., 2013), and that text has found a home in many classrooms, churches, and discussion groups. The sooner folks can read the great texts of the Christian theological tradition for themselves, however, the better.

My thanks go out to many people who have contributed to this project. Wabash College and especially its dean, Scott Feller, and my departmental colleagues have made this an exciting and rewarding context for teaching, learning, and research. Beverly Cunningham was an incredibly helpful resource in organizing a complicated project, and I am glad to thank her here for her help and good cheer. The staff at Westminster John Knox, especially Executive Editor Bob Ratcliff and Michele Blum, were supportive, understanding, and helpful in dealing with the myriad problems of copyright law,

permissions requests, formatting, and so many other things. My wife, Kelly, and our daughter, Madeleine, provided welcome respite for a weary professor, and I cannot thank them enough for all that they do and are.

D.R.N.
October 31, 2014

Preface to the First Edition

In 1983 The Westminster Press published a book I had written called *A History of Christian Theology*. The book's reviewers have been kind, and sales have been good. I have been particularly pleased by the teachers and students who have thanked me for the help it gave them in teaching and learning theology's history.

That earlier book, however, had an obvious limitation: it presented its story primarily in my words, with my interpretations. As soon as possible, students of any kind of history should be reading primary texts for themselves and reaching their own interpretations. But that isn't always easy. One of the themes of my earlier book was that Christian theology has always been a pluralistic affair, but with the escalating price of books, it is difficult to put together an affordable collection of readings that captures that diversity. I hope these two volumes will help.

To cast modesty aside, I think I have succeeded beyond my expectations. I had expected to put together a book of readings that would need to function as a supplement to a narrative history—my own or someone else's. That certainly remains one possible use. But, rather to my surprise, I found it possible to put together excerpts that, with brief introductions, form a roughly coherent narrative and stand on their own as a history of Christian theology. Keeping in mind that they might be used independently, I have repeated some material from my earlier book in introductions and suggestions for further reading.

These volumes share some of the features of my earlier book: an ecumenical perspective, a commitment to representing the tradition's diversity, a focus on the history of ideas rather than institutional history. I have tried to choose selections long enough to give a sense of the writer's style and to make it clear that theology does not consist simply of unsupported assertions but involves

arguments. I have sought to keep my own introductions and notes to a minimum, to make room for as much of the primary texts as possible. Occasionally I have substituted U.S. spellings for British. Teachers are sometimes tempted to leave out things that have become, for them, overly familiar—but even the most familiar texts are often new to a student. Therefore, while I hope that even those expert in the field will find a few unfamiliar passages here, I have tried not to leave out the obvious ones.

No anthology is ever really satisfactory. If I were more learned or more imaginative, I am sure this one would be better. We keep learning more about the past, and we keep asking new questions of it as new issues arise in the present. So history keeps going out of date. In compiling this anthology, I was particularly conscious that new insights in feminist scholarship raise questions about both the selection and the translation of texts. I wish I had been able to take them more into account.

I am grateful to James Heaney, a committed and courageous editor who encouraged and supported my earlier book, and to Cynthia Thompson, my helpful editor for these volumes. The Lilly Library of Wabash College and the Regenstein Library of the University of Chicago and their staffs helped me at many points. My emeritus colleague John Charles answered questions over coffee about everything from medieval history to Greek grammar. I am also grateful to James McCord and the Center of Theological Inquiry for providing me with a wonderful “home away from home” for a year during which the final stages of this project were completed. My colleagues, students, and friends at Wabash continue to be a community that nurtures me in many ways. Wabash faculty development funds and money from the Eric Dean Fund helped support my research. I am above all grateful to my two research assistants: for over a year, David Schulz did everything from typing to tracking down publishers, and David Kirtley provided invaluable assistance in the project’s final stages. Without them, I am not sure either I or the book would have made it.

W.C.P.

Gnosticism and Its Opponents

The New Testament records the beginnings of Christian theology. Paul and the author of the Gospel of John were the first great Christian theologians; the debates between Jewish and Gentile Christians recorded in Acts and in Paul's letters produced Christianity's first major theological controversies. Since those first Christian texts are as accessible as the nearest Bible, however, this collection begins with the earliest surviving Christian writings from outside the New Testament—the first of them probably written about the same time as the latest New Testament texts.

There were many very different strands in earliest Christianity, and these first theologians struggled to define what was “orthodox” and what was “heresy.” The answers emerged only gradually. Perhaps the most important early debate concerned Gnosticism. “Gnosis” means “wisdom,” and the Gnostics claimed to teach secret wisdom concerning how the world and evil emerged from disorder among the divine powers and how, by understanding our true natures, we can free our souls from our bodies and return to our true origins. Gnosticism began independent of Christianity, but many Gnostics soon identified Christ with the Savior figure common to Gnostic myths. But they denied that Christ had had a real physical body, for they were convinced of the evil of physical things. Some New Testament passages (Colossians 2 and Johannine emphases on Christ's human body, for instance) seem already directed against Gnostic Christians, but the conflict reached its height in the second century.

Other controversies took shape about the same time. Around 150 in Rome a Christian named Marcion advocated a radical break with Jewish traditions. The God of the Old Testament, he said, was the imperfect creator of an imperfect world and quite different from the unqualifiedly good Father

of Jesus Christ, who sent his Son to rescue us from this creation. Jews and Christians simply worship two different Gods, and the Father of Christ is not responsible for the evil in a world he did not make. In Asia Minor, about the same time, Montanus and his followers proclaimed that the Holy Spirit spoke directly through them in their prophecies, with an authority that could supersede the writings of the apostles or the teachings of church officials.

In the face of Gnostics, Marcionites, and Montanists, their opponents had to defend the church's beliefs and patterns of authority more clearly. Gradually they defined a "canon" of official New Testament texts. The authority of bishops provided a way of overruling Gnostic teachers and Montanist prophets. Christian theologians began to define more clearly what they believed about Christ—emphasizing his full humanity and how he saves us. A clearer definition of "orthodox" Christian faith was emerging.

From *The Gospel of Thomas*

Beginning in 1945 a collection of Gnostic texts was discovered near the Egyptian village of Nag Hammadi. Earlier students of Gnosticism had been largely dependent on reports from the Gnostics' opponents. To a much greater extent, we can now hear the Gnostics speak for themselves. The Gospel of Thomas, written in Syria, Palestine, or Mesopotamia sometime in the second century, is one of the most interesting of the Nag Hammadi documents. Many of the sayings of Jesus it presents closely parallel passages from the New Testament Gospels, but others illustrate the Gnostic emphasis on a secret tradition known only to the elect—and hint at the complex Gnostic attitudes toward women.

These are the secret sayings which the living Jesus spoke and which Didymos Judas Thomas wrote down.

(1) And he said, "Whoever finds the interpretation of these sayings will not experience death."

(2) Jesus said, "Let him who seeks continue seeking until he finds. When he finds, he will become troubled. When he becomes troubled, he will be astonished, and he will rule over the All."

(3) Jesus said, "If those who lead you say to you, 'See, the Kingdom is in the sky,' then the birds of the sky will precede you. If they say to you, 'It is in the sea,' then the fish will precede you. Rather, the Kingdom is inside of you, and it is outside of you. When you come to know yourselves, then you will become known, and you will realize that it is you who are the sons of the living Father. But if you will not know yourselves, you dwell in poverty and it is you who are that poverty". . . .

(13) Jesus said to His disciples, "Compare me to someone and tell Me whom I am like."

Simon Peter said to Him, "You are like a righteous angel."

Matthew said to Him, "You are like a wise philosopher."

Thomas said to Him, "Master, my mouth is wholly incapable of saying whom You are like."

Jesus said, "I am not your master. Because you have drunk, you have become intoxicated from the bubbling spring which I have measured out."

And He took him and withdrew and told him three things. When Thomas returned to his companions, they asked him, "What did Jesus say to you?"

Thomas said to them, "If I tell you one of the things which he told me, you will pick up stones and throw them at me; a fire will come out of the stones and burn you up." . . .

(50) Jesus said, "If they say to you, 'Where did you come from?' say to them, 'We came from the light, the place where the light came into being on its own accord and established [itself] and became manifest through their image.' If they say to you, 'Is it you?' say, 'We are its children, and we are the elect of the Living Father.' If they ask you, 'What is the sign of your Father in you?' say to them, 'It is movement and repose'". . . .

(108) Jesus said, "He who will drink from My mouth will become like Me. I myself shall become he, and the things that are hidden will be revealed to him."

(109) Jesus said, "The Kingdom is like a man who had [hidden] treasure in his field without knowing it. And [after] he died, he left it to his son. The son did not know (about the treasure). He inherited the field and sold [it]. And the one who bought it went plowing and found the treasure. He began to lend money at interest to whomever he wished."

(110) Jesus said, "Whoever finds the world and becomes rich, let him renounce the world."

(111) Jesus said, "The heavens and the earth will be rolled up in your presence. And the one who lives from the Living One will not see death." Does not Jesus say, "Whoever finds himself is superior to the world"?

(112) Jesus said, "Woe to the flesh that depends on the soul; woe to the soul that depends on the flesh."

(113) His disciples said to Him, "When will the Kingdom come?"

[Jesus said,] "It will not come by waiting for it. It will not be a matter of saying 'Here it is' or 'There it is.' Rather, the Kingdom of the Father is spread out upon the earth, and men do not see it."

(114) Simon Peter said to them, "Let Mary leave us, for women are not worthy of Life."

Jesus said, "I myself shall lead her in order to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every woman who will make herself male will enter the Kingdom of Heaven."

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From *The Second Treatise of the Great Seth*

When and where this Nag Hammadi text was written remain unclear, but it certainly presents Gnostic ideas, including Docetism—the denial of Christ's real humanity. According to this selection, the Savior entered a human body but remained somehow quite distinct from that body, and Simon of Cyrene not only carried Jesus' cross (Matt. 27:32; Mark 15:21; Luke 23:26) but also died on it in Jesus' place. The text also refers to a number of the spiritual powers common in the complex Gnostic systems.

I visited a bodily dwelling. I cast out the one who was in it first, and I went in. And the whole multitude of the archons became troubled. And all the matter of the archons as well as all the begotten powers of the earth were shaken when it saw the likeness of the Image, since it was mixed. And I am the one who was in it, not resembling him who was in it first. For he was an earthly man, but I, I am from above the heavens. I did not refuse them even to become a Christ, but I did not reveal myself to them in the love which was coming forth from me. I revealed that I am a stranger to the regions below. . . .

And there came about a disturbance and a fight around the Seraphim and Cherubim since their glory will fade, and the confusion around Adonaios on both sides and their dwelling—to the Cosmocrator and him who said, "Let us seize him"; others again, "The plan will certainly not materialize." For Adonaios knows me because of hope. And I was in the mouths of lions. And the plan which they devised about me to release their error and their senselessness—I did not succumb to them as they had planned. But I was not afflicted at all. Those who were there punished me. And I did not die in reality but in appearance, lest I be put to shame by them because these are my kinsfolk.

I removed the shame from me and I did not become fainthearted in the face of what happened to me at their hands. I was about to succumb to fear, and I <suffered> according to their sight and thought, in order that they may never find any word to speak about them. For my death which they think happened, (happened) to them in their error and blindness, since they nailed their man

unto their death. For their Ennoias did not see me, for they were deaf and blind. But in doing these things, they condemn themselves. Yes, they saw me; they punished me. It was another, their father, who drank the gall and the vinegar; it was not I. They struck me with the reed; it was another, Simon, who bore the cross on his shoulder. It was another upon whom they placed the crown of thorns. But I was rejoicing in the height over all the wealth of the archons and the offspring of their error, of their empty glory. And I was laughing at their ignorance.

Translated by Joseph A. Gibbons, Roger A. Bullard, and Frederik Wisse. From *The Nag Hammadi Library*, 3rd edition, edited by James M. Robinson (Leiden: Brill, 1996), pages 330–32. Copyright © 1978 by E. J. Brill. Reprinted by permission of E. J. Brill and Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc.

IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH (D. CA. 110)

From *Letter to the Trallians*

Ignatius, the bishop of Antioch in Syria and a great opponent of the Gnostics, was arrested for his Christian faith and led off to his death in Rome about 110. On the way from Syria to Rome, under arrest and facing death, he wrote several letters to Christian churches in the regions through which he traveled, urging faithfulness to their bishops and belief in Christ's real humanity.

1. Well do I realize what a character you have—above reproach and steady under strain. It is not just affected, but it comes naturally to you, as I gathered from Polybius, your bishop. By God's will and that of Jesus Christ, he came to me in Smyrna, and so heartily congratulated me on being a prisoner for Jesus Christ that in him I saw your whole congregation. I welcomed, then, your good will, which reached me by him, and I gave thanks that I found you, as I heard, to be following God.

2. For when you obey the bishop as if he were Jesus Christ, you are (as I see it) living not in a merely human fashion but in Jesus Christ's way, who for our sakes suffered death that you might believe in his death and so escape dying yourselves. It is essential, therefore, to act in no way without the bishop, just as you are doing. Rather submit even to the presbytery as to the apostles of Jesus Christ. He is our Hope [cf. 1 Tim. 1:1], and if we live in union with him now, we shall gain eternal life. . . .

6. I urge you, therefore—not I, but Jesus Christ's love—use only Christian food. Keep off foreign fare, by which I mean heresy. For those people mingle Jesus Christ with their teachings just to gain your confidence under

false pretenses. It is as if they were giving a deadly poison mixed with honey and wine, with the result that the unsuspecting victim gladly accepts it and drinks down death with fatal pleasure.

7. Be on your guard, then, against such people. This you will do by not being puffed up and by keeping very close to [our] God, Jesus Christ, and the bishop and the apostles' precepts. Inside the sanctuary a man is pure; outside he is impure. That means: whoever does anything without the bishop, presbytery, and deacons does not have a clear conscience.

8. It is not because I have heard of any such thing in your case that I write thus. No, in my love for you I am warning you ahead, since I foresee the devil's wiles. Recapture, then, your gentleness, and by faith (that's the Lord's flesh) and by love (that's Jesus Christ's blood) make yourselves new creatures. Let none of you hold anything against his neighbor. Do not give the heathen opportunities whereby God's people should be scoffed at through the stupidity of a few. For, "Woe to him by whose folly my name is scoffed at before any" [Isa. 52:5].

9. Be deaf, then, to any talk that ignores Jesus Christ, of David's lineage, of Mary; who was really born, ate, and drank; was really persecuted under Pontius Pilate; was really crucified and died, in the sight of heaven and earth and the underworld. He was really raised from the dead, for his Father raised him, just as his Father will raise us, who believe on him, through Christ Jesus, apart from whom we have no genuine life.

10. And if, as some atheists (I mean unbelievers) say, his suffering was a sham (it's really *they* who are a sham!), why, then, am I a prisoner? Why do I want to fight with wild beasts? In that case I shall die to no purpose. Yes, and I am maligning the Lord too!

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IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH

From *Letter to the Romans*

Ignatius feared that Christians in Rome might try to arrange his escape; he wrote ahead to assure them of his willingness to die for his faith.

4. I am corresponding with all the churches and bidding them all realize that I am voluntarily dying for God—if, that is, you do not interfere. I plead

with you, do not do me an unseasonable kindness. Let me be fodder for wild beasts—that is how I can get to God. I am God’s wheat and I am being ground by the teeth of wild beasts to make a pure loaf for Christ. I would rather that you fawn on the beasts so that they may be my tomb and no scrap of my body be left. Thus, when I have fallen asleep, I shall be a burden to no one. Then I shall be a real disciple of Jesus Christ when the world sees my body no more. Pray Christ for me that by these means I may become God’s sacrifice. I do not give orders like Peter and Paul. They were apostles: I am a convict. They were at liberty: I am still a slave [Cf. 1 Cor. 7:22]. But if I suffer, I shall be emancipated by Jesus Christ; and united to him, I shall rise to freedom.

5. Even now as a prisoner, I am learning to forego my own wishes. All the way from Syria to Rome I am fighting with wild beasts, by land and sea, night and day, chained as I am to ten leopards (I mean to a detachment of soldiers), who only get worse the better you treat them. But by their injustices I am becoming a better disciple, “though not for that reason am I acquitted” [1 Cor. 4:4]. What a thrill I shall have from the wild beasts that are ready for me! I hope they will make short work of me. I shall coax them on to eat me up at once and not to hold off, as sometimes happens, through fear. And if they are reluctant, I shall force them to it. Forgive me—I know what is good for me. Now is the moment I am beginning to be a disciple. May nothing seen or unseen begrudge me making my way to Jesus Christ. Come fire, cross, battling with wild beasts, wrenching of bones, mangling of limbs, crushing of my whole body, cruel tortures of the devil—only let me get to Jesus Christ!

From *Early Christian Fathers*, edited and translated by Cyril C. Richardson (Volume 1: The Library of Christian Classics) (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953), pages 104–5. First published in MCMLIII by the SCM Press Ltd., London, and The Westminster Press, Philadelphia. Used by permission of the publishers.

IRENÆUS (CA. 140–CA. 202)

From *Against Heresies*

Irenaeus was born in Asia Minor around 140 but moved to what is now France, where he served as bishop of the city of Lyons until his death around 202. His Against Heresies tried to summarize and refute all the heresies he saw threatening the church. His summaries remain a crucial source of information about his opponents. This passage discusses the system of Ptolemaeus, an Egyptian Gnostic of the late second century. As in many Gnostic theories, a large number of divine powers or aeons separates the highest divinity from the creation of the physical world. One of the lower aeons is Sophia, or Wisdom, whose fall brought about the real beginning of evil.

Book 1

Chapter 1. 1. They maintain, then, that in the invisible and ineffable heights above there exists a certain perfect, pre-existent Aeon, whom they call Proarche, Propator, and Bythus and describe as being invisible and incomprehensible. Eternal and unbegotten, he remained throughout innumerable cycles of ages in profound serenity and quiescence. There existed along with him Ennoea, whom they also call Charis and Sige. At last this Bythus determined to send forth from himself the beginning of all things, and deposited this production (which he had resolved to bring forth) in his contemporary Sige, even as seed is deposited in the womb. She then, having received this seed, and becoming pregnant, gave birth to Nous, who was both similar and equal to him who had produced him, and was alone capable of comprehending his father's greatness. This Nous they call also Monogenes, and Father, and the Beginning of all Things. Along with him was also produced Aletheia; and these four constituted the first and first-begotten Pythagorean Tetrad, which they also denominate the root of all things. For there are first Bythus and Sige, and then Nous and Aletheia.

And Monogenes, perceiving for what purpose he had been produced, also himself sent forth Logos and Zoe, being the father of all those who were to come after him, and the beginning and fashioning of the entire Pleroma [the heavenly hierarchy of the aeons]. By the conjunction of Logos and Zoe were brought forth Anthropos and Ecclesia; and thus was formed the first-begotten Ogdoad, the root and substance of all things, called among them by four names, viz., Bythus, and Nous, and Logos, and Anthropos. For each of these is masculo-feminine, as follows: Propator was united by a conjunction with his Ennoea; then Monogenes, that is Nous, with Aletheia; Logos with Zoe, and Anthropos with Ecclesia. . . .

2. . . . Logos and Zoe, after producing Anthropos and Ecclesia, sent forth other ten Aeons, whose names are the following: Bythius and Mixis, Ageratos and Henosis, Autophyes and Hedone, Acinetos and Syncrasis, Monogenes and Macaria. These are the ten Aeons whom they declare to have been produced by Logos and Zoe. They then add that Anthropos himself, along with Ecclesia, produced twelve Aeons, to whom they give the following names: Paracletus and Pistis, Patricos and Elpis, Metricos and Agape, Ainos and Syesis, Ecclesiasticus and Macariotes, Theletos and Sophia. . . .

Chapter 2. 2. But there rushed forth in advance of the rest that Aeon who was much the latest of them, and was the youngest of the Duodecad [the twelve aeons just mentioned] which sprang from Anthropos and Ecclesia, namely Sophia, and suffered passion apart from the embrace of her consort Theletos. This passion, indeed, first arose among those who were connected

with Nous and Aletheia, but passed as by contagion to this degenerate Aeon, who acted under a pretence of love, but was in reality influenced by temerity, because she had not, like Nous, enjoyed communion with the perfect Father. This passion, they say, consisted in a desire to search into the nature of the Father; for she wished, according to them, to comprehend his greatness. When she could not attain her end, inasmuch as she aimed at an impossibility, and thus became involved in an extreme agony of mind, while both on account of the vast profundity as well as the unsearchable nature of the Father, and on account of the love she bore him, she was ever stretching herself forward, there was danger lest she should at last have been absorbed by his sweetness, and resolved into his absolute essence, unless she had met with that Power which supports all things, and preserves them outside of the unspeakable greatness. This power they term Horos [limit]; by whom, they say, she was restrained and supported; and that then, having with difficulty been brought back to herself, she was convinced that the Father is incomprehensible. . . .

4. And by this Horos they declare that Sophia was purified and established, while she was also restored to her proper conjunction. For her enthymesis (or inborn idea) having been taken away from her, along with its supervening passion, she herself certainly remained within the Pleroma; but her enthymesis, with its passion, was separated from her by Horos, fenced off, and expelled from that circle. This enthymesis was, no doubt, a spiritual substance, possessing some of the natural tendencies of an Aeon, but at the same time shapeless and without form, because it had received nothing. And on this account they say that it was an imbecile and feminine production.

5. After this substance had been placed outside of the Pleroma of the Aeons, and its mother restored to her proper conjunction, they tell us that Monogenes, acting in accordance with the prudent forethought of the Father, gave origin to another conjugal pair, namely Christ and the Holy Spirit (lest any of the Aeons should fall into a calamity similar to that of Sophia), for the purpose of fortifying and strengthening the Pleroma, and who at the same time completed the number of the Aeons. . . .

Chapter 3. 1. Such, then, is the account they give of what took place within the Pleroma; such the calamities that flowed from the passion which seized upon the Aeon who has been named, and who was within a little of perishing by being absorbed in the universal substance, through her inquisitive searching after the Father; such the consolidation [of that Aeon] from her condition of agony by Horos, and Stauros, and Lytrotēs, and Carpistes, and Horothetes, and Metagoges. Such also is the account of the generation of the later Aeons, namely of the first Christ and of the Holy Spirit, both of whom

were produced by the Father after the repentance [of Sophia], and of the second Christ (whom they also style Saviour), who owed his being to the joint contributions [of the Aeons]. They tell us, however, that this knowledge has not been openly divulged, because all are not capable of receiving it, but has been mystically revealed by the Saviour through means of parables to those qualified for understanding it.

From *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, edited and translated by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Buffalo: Christian Literature Company, 1884–1886), Volume 1, pages 316–19.

EUSEBIUS (CA. 260–CA. 339)

From *Church History*

Eusebius was bishop of Caesarea in Syria and played an important role at the Council of Nicaea in 325, but he is best known for his history of the early church. His bias against the Montanists is obvious. This report was written more than a century after Montanus began prophesying somewhere between 155 and 175, so it needs to be read with caution, but it still provides much of our best evidence about the beginnings of Montanism.

Book 5

Chapter 16. There is said to be a certain village called Ardabau in that part of Mysia, which borders upon Phrygia. There first, they say, when Gratus was proconsul of Asia, a recent convert, Montanus by name, through his unquenchable desire for leadership, gave the adversary opportunity against him. And he 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. Some of those who heard his spurious utterances at that time were indignant, and they rebuked him as one that was possessed, and that was under the control of a demon, and was led by a deceitful spirit, and was distracting the multitude; and they forbade him to talk, remembering the distinction drawn by the Lord and his warning to guard watchfully against the coming of false prophets. But others imagining themselves possessed of the Holy Spirit and of a prophetic gift, were elated and not a little puffed up; and forgetting the distinction of the Lord, they challenged the mad and insidious and seducing spirit, and were cheated and deceived by him. In consequence of this, he could no longer be held in check, so as to keep

silence. Thus by artifice, or rather by such a system of wicked craft, the devil, devising destruction for the disobedient, and being unworthily honored by them, secretly excited and inflamed their understandings which had already become estranged from the true faith. And he stirred up besides two women, and filled them with the false spirit, so that they talked wildly and unreasonably and strangely, like the person already mentioned. And the spirit pronounced them blessed as they rejoiced and gloried in him, and puffed them up by the magnitude of his promises. But sometimes he rebuked them openly in a wise and faithful manner, that he might seem to be a reprover. But those of the Phrygians that were deceived were few in number.

And the arrogant spirit taught them to revile the entire universal Church under heaven, because the spirit of false prophecy received neither the honor from it nor entrance into it. For the faithful in Asia met often in many places throughout Asia to consider this matter, and examined the novel utterances and pronounced them profane, and rejected the heresy, and thus these persons were expelled from the Church and debarred from communion.

Translated by Arthur Cushman McGiffert. From *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 2nd Series, edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1890–1900), Volume 1, pages 231–32.

From *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*

A copy of this document was discovered in Constantinople in 1873. Its origin continues to be debated, but it seems likely to have come from somewhere in Syria, sometime in the second century. It apparently describes the customs of quite early Syrian Christians. It is not directed against Montanism as such, but it does show a caution about wandering prophets and the emphasis on order and established church leadership that characterized many responses to the Montanists. The Teaching (or Didache, as it is called in Greek) also provides important information about the early theory and practice of the Eucharist and baptism.

See “that no one leads you astray” [Matt. 24:4] from this way of the teaching, since such a one’s teaching is godless.

If you can bear the Lord’s full yoke, you will be perfect. But if you cannot, then do what you can.

Now about food: undertake what you can. But keep strictly away from what is offered to idols, for that implies worshiping dead gods.

Now about baptism: this is how to baptize. Give public instruction on all these points, and then “baptize” in running water, “in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” [Matt. 28:19]. If you do not have

running water, baptize in some other. If you cannot in cold, then in warm. If you have neither, then pour water on the head three times “in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” [Matt. 28:19]. Before the baptism, moreover, the one who baptizes and the one being baptized must fast, and any others who can. And you must tell the one being baptized to fast for one or two days beforehand. . . .

Now about the Eucharist: This is how to give thanks: First in connection with the cup:

“We thank you, our Father, for the holy vine of David, your child, which you have revealed through Jesus, your child. To you be glory forever.”

Then in connection with the piece [broken off the loaf]:

“We thank you, our Father, for the life and knowledge which you have revealed through Jesus, your child. To you be glory forever.

“As this piece [of bread] was scattered over the hills and then was brought together and made one, so let your Church be brought together from the ends of the earth into your Kingdom. For yours is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ forever.”

You must not let anyone eat or drink of your Eucharist except those baptized in the Lord’s name. For in reference to this the Lord said, “Do not give what is sacred to the dogs.” [Matt. 7:6]. . .

Now, you should welcome anyone who comes your way and teaches you all we have been saying. But if the teacher proves himself a renegade and by teaching otherwise contradicts all this, pay no attention to him. But if his teaching furthers the Lord’s righteousness and knowledge, welcome him as the Lord.

Now about the apostles and prophets: Act in line with the gospel precept. Welcome every apostle on arriving, as if he were the Lord. But he must not stay beyond one day. In case of necessity, however, the next day too. If he stays three days, he is a false prophet. On departing, an apostle must not accept anything save sufficient food to carry him till his next lodging. If he asks for money, he is a false prophet.

While a prophet is making ecstatic utterances, you must not test or examine him. For “every sin will be forgiven,” but this sin “will not be forgiven” [Matt. 12:31]. However, not everybody making ecstatic utterances is a prophet, but only if he behaves like the Lord. It is by their conduct that the false prophet and the [true] prophet can be distinguished. For instance, if a prophet marks out a table in the Spirit, he must not eat from it. If he does, he is a false prophet. Again, every prophet who teaches the truth but fails to practice what he preaches is a false prophet. But every attested and genuine prophet who acts with a view to symbolizing the mystery of the Church, and does not teach you to do all he does, must not be judged by you. His

judgment rests with God. For the ancient prophets too acted in this way. But if someone says in the Spirit, “Give me money, or something else,” you must not heed him. However, if he tells you to give for others in need, no one must condemn him.

From *Early Christian Fathers*, edited and translated by Cyril C. Richardson (Volume 1: The Library of Christian Classics) (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953), pages 174–77. First published in MCMLIII by the SCM Press Ltd., London, and The Westminster Press, Philadelphia. Used by permission of the publishers.

IRENÆUS

From Against Heresies

Irenaeus is not only a good source of information about many early heresies; he was also important in developing the “orthodox” response to them. The following selections begin with his account of Marcion’s views—his belief in two Gods and his edited version of the New Testament. Irenaeus then goes on to develop his own ideas about Scripture, tradition, and the church, in large part in response to Gnostic claims to a secret tradition of “perfect knowledge.”

Book 1

Chapter 27. 2. Marcion of Pontus . . . advanced the most daring blasphemy against Him who is proclaimed as God by the law and the prophets, declaring Him to be the author of evils, to take delight in war, to be infirm of purpose, and even to be contrary to Himself. But Jesus being derived from that father who is above the God that made the world, and coming into Judaea in the time of Pontius Pilate the governor, who was the procurator of Tiberius Caesar, was manifested in the form of a man to those who were in Judaea, abolishing the prophets and the law, and all the works of that God who made the world, whom also he calls Cosmocrator. Besides this, he mutilates the Gospel which is according to Luke, removing all that is written respecting the generation of the Lord, and setting aside a great deal of the teaching of the Lord, in which the Lord is recorded as most clearly confessing that the Maker of this universe is His Father. He likewise persuaded his disciples that he himself was more worthy of credit than are those apostles who have handed down the Gospel to us, furnishing them not with the Gospel, but merely a fragment of it. In like manner, too, he dismembered the Epistles of Paul, removing all that is said by the apostle respecting that God who made the world, to the effect that He is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and also those passages from

the prophetic writings which the apostle quotes, in order to teach us that they announced beforehand the coming of the Lord. . . .

Book 2

Chapter 25. 3. Marcion, therefore, himself, by dividing God into two, maintaining one to be good and the other judicial, does in fact, on both sides, put an end to deity. For he that is the judicial one, if he be not good, is not God, because he from whom goodness is absent is no God at all; and again, he who is good, if he has no judicial power, suffers the same [loss] as the former, by being deprived of his character of deity. . . .

Book 3

Chapter 1. 1. We have learned from none others the plan of our salvation, than from those through whom the Gospel has come down to us, which they did at one time proclaim in public, and, at a later period, by the will of God, handed down to us in the Scriptures, to be the ground and pillar of our faith. For it is unlawful to assert that they preached before they possessed "perfect knowledge," as some do even venture to say, boasting themselves as improvers of the apostles. For, after our Lord rose from the dead, [the apostles] were invested with power from on high when the Holy Spirit came down [upon them], were filled from all [His gifts], and had perfect knowledge: they departed to the ends of the earth, preaching the glad tidings of the good things [sent] from God to us, and proclaiming the peace of heaven to men, who indeed do all equally and individually possess the Gospel of God. Matthew also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect, while Peter and Paul were preaching at Rome, and laying the foundations of the Church. After their departure, Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, did also hand down to us in writing what had been preached by Peter. Luke also, the companion of Paul, recorded in a book the Gospel preached by him. Afterwards, John, the disciple of the Lord, who also had leaned upon His breast, did himself publish a Gospel during his residence at Ephesus in Asia. These have all declared to us that there is one God, Creator of heaven and earth, announced by the law and the prophets; and one Christ, the Son of God. If anyone does not agree to these truths, he despises the companions of the Lord; nay more, he despises Christ Himself the Lord; yea, he despises the Father also, and stands self-condemned, resisting and opposing his own salvation, as is the case with all heretics. . . .

Chapter 2. 2. But, again, when we refer them to that tradition which originates from the apostles, [and] which is preserved by means of the successions of presbyters in the Churches, they object to tradition, saying that they

themselves are wiser not merely than the presbyters, but even than the apostles, because they have discovered the unadulterated truth. . . .

Chapter 3. 1. It is within the power of all, therefore, in every Church, who may wish to see the truth, to contemplate clearly the tradition of the apostles manifested throughout the whole world; and we are in a position to reckon up those who were by the apostles instituted bishops in the Churches, and [to demonstrate] the succession of these men to our own times; those who neither taught nor knew of anything like what these [heretics] rave about. For if the apostles had known hidden mysteries, which they were in the habit of imparting to “the perfect” apart and privily from the rest, they would have delivered them especially to those to whom they were also committing the Churches themselves. For they were desirous that these men should be very perfect and blameless in all things, whom also they were leaving behind as their successors, delivering up their own place of government to these men; which men, if they discharged their functions honestly, would be a great boon [to the Church], but if they should fall away, the direst calamity.

2. Since, however, it would be very tedious, in such a volume as this, to reckon up the successions of all the Churches, we do put to confusion all those who, in whatever manner, whether by an evil self-pleasing, by vainglory, or by blindness and perverse opinion, assemble in unauthorized meetings; [we do this, I say,] by indicating that tradition derived from the apostles, of the very great, the very ancient, and universally known Church founded and organized at Rome by the two most glorious apostles, Peter and Paul; as also [by pointing out] the faith preached to men, which comes down to our time by means of the successions of the bishops. For it is a matter of necessity that every Church should agree with this Church, on account of its pre-eminent authority, that is, the faithful everywhere, inasmuch as the apostolic tradition has been preserved continuously by those [faithful men] who exist everywhere. . . .

Chapter 18. 6. . . . For if He did not truly suffer, no thanks to Him, since there was no suffering at all; and when we shall actually begin to suffer, He will seem as leading us astray, exhorting us to endure buffeting, and to turn the other cheek, if He did not Himself before us in reality suffer the same; and as He misled them by seeming to them what He was not, so does He also mislead us, by exhorting us to endure what He did not endure Himself. [In that case] we shall be even above the Master, because we suffer and sustain what our Master never bore or endured. But as our Lord is alone truly Master, so the Son of God is truly good and patient, the Word of God the Father having been made the Son of man. For he fought and conquered; for He was

man contending for the fathers, and through obedience doing away with disobedience completely: for He bound the strong man, and set free the weak, and endowed His own handiwork with salvation, by destroying sin. For He is a most holy and merciful Lord, and loves the human race.

7. Therefore, as I have already said, He caused man (human nature) to cleave to and to become one with God. For unless man had overcome the enemy of man, the enemy would not have been legitimately vanquished. And again: unless it had been God who had freely given salvation, we could never have possessed it securely. And unless man had been joined to God, he could never have become a partaker of incorruptibility. For it was incumbent upon the Mediator between God and men, by His relationship to both, to bring both to friendship and concord, and present man to God, while He revealed God to man. For, in what way could we be partakers of the adoption of sons, unless we had received from Him through the Son that fellowship which refers to Himself, unless His Word, having been made flesh, had entered into communion with us? Wherefore also He passed through every stage of life, restoring to all communion with God. Those, therefore, who assert that He appeared putatively, and was neither born in the flesh nor truly made man, are as yet under the old condemnation, holding out patronage to sin; for, by their showing, death has not been vanquished, which “reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam’s transgression” [Rom. 5:14]. But the law coming, which was given by Moses, and testifying of sin that it is a sinner, did truly take away his (death’s) kingdom, showing that he was no king, but a robber; and it revealed him as a murderer. It laid, however, a weighty burden upon man, who had sin in himself, showing that he was liable to death. For as the law was spiritual, it merely made sin to stand out in relief, but did not destroy it. For sin had no dominion over the spirit, but over man. For it behooved Him who was to destroy sin, and redeem man under the power of death, that He should Himself be made that very same thing which he was, that is, man who had been drawn by sin into bondage, but was held by death, so that sin should be destroyed by man, and man should go forth from death. For as by the disobedience of the one man who was originally moulded from virgin soil, the many were made sinners, and forfeited life; so was it necessary that, by the obedience of one man, who was originally born from a virgin, many should be justified and receive salvation. Thus, then was the Word of God made man, as also Moses says: “God, true are His works” [Deut. 32:4]. But if, not having been made flesh, He did appear as if flesh, His work was not a true one. But what He did appear, that He also was: God recapitulated in Himself the ancient formation of man, that He might kill sin, deprive death of its power, and vivify man; and therefore His works are true.

Chapter 19. 1. But again, those who assert that He was simply a mere man, begotten by Joseph, remaining in the bondage of the old disobedience, are in a state of death; having been not as yet joined to the Word of God the Father, nor receiving liberty through the Son, as He does Himself declare: "If the Son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed" [John 8:36]. But, being ignorant of Him who from the Virgin is Emmanuel, they are deprived of His gift, which is eternal life; and not receiving the incorruptible Word, they remain in mortal flesh, and are debtors to death, not obtaining the antidote of life. To whom the Word says, mentioning His own gift of grace: "I said, Ye are all the sons of the Highest, and gods; but ye shall die like men" [Ps. 82:6-7]. He speaks undoubtedly these words to those who have not received the gift of adoption, but who despise the incarnation of the pure generation of the Word of God, defraud human nature of promotion into God, and prove themselves ungrateful to the Word of God, who became flesh for them. For it was for this end that the Word of God was made man, and He who was the Son of God became the Son of man, that man, having been taken into the Word, and receiving the adoption, might become the son of God. For by no other means could we have attained to incorruptibility and immortality, unless we had been united to incorruptibility and immortality. But how could we be joined to incorruptibility and immortality, unless, first, incorruptibility and immortality had become that which we also are, so that the corruptible might be swallowed up by incorruptibility, and the mortal by immortality, that we might receive the adoption of sons?

From *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, edited and translated by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Buffalo: Christian Literature Company, 1884-1886), Volume 1, pages 352, 459, 414-16, 447-49.