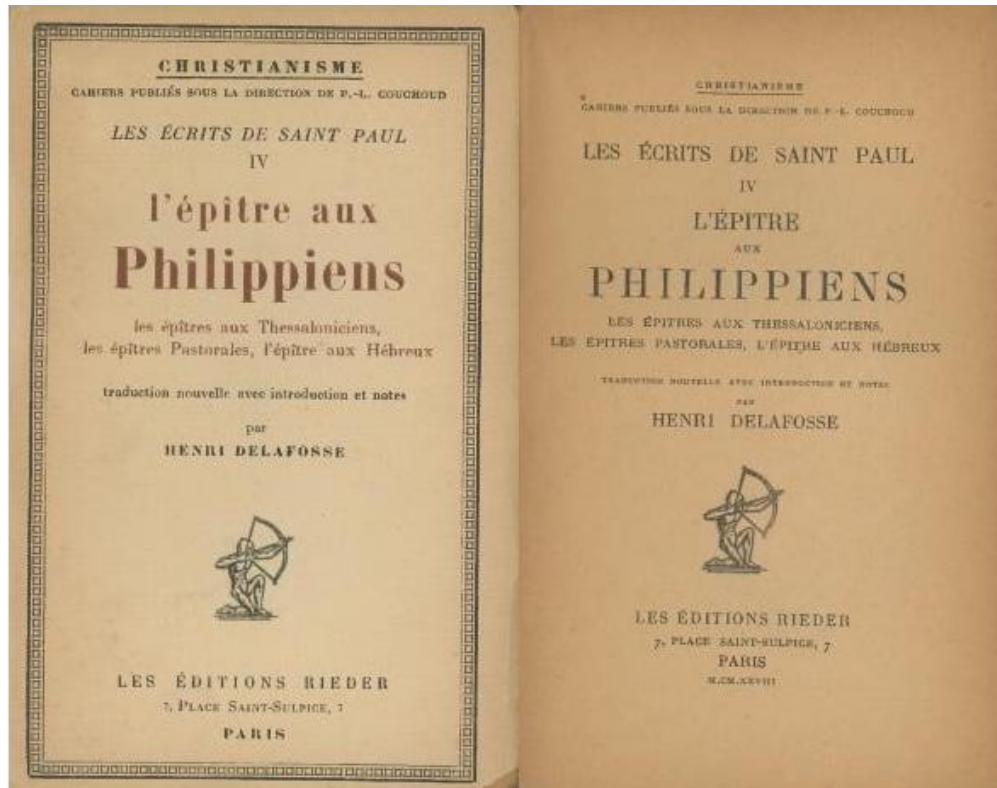


This file was created October 2021 as a translation for my personal use and without any thought of sharing publicly at the time. I only ask that you keep that in mind when using it. I have made a copy of the French text available at

<https://archive.org/details/turmel-les-ecrits-de-saint-paul-iv-l-epitre-aux-philippiens>

Neil Godfrey - November 2023



## EPISTLE TO THE PHILIPPIANS

Paul evangelized Philippi during his second mission (47-48). After a brief stay, which does not seem to have exceeded a few weeks, he was expelled by the police of Rome. Despite the short time he had at his disposal, he gathered many adherents. Before leaving he "gathered and exhorted the brethren" in the house of Lydia, a woman of pagan origin but affiliated with Judaism, to whom the Lord had "opened her heart to listen to what Paul was saying" [Acts, XVI, 12-40]. A few years later (58), on the verge of completing his third mission, Paul passed through Philippi again [Acts, XX, 1, 6], although we cannot say how long he stayed there. This is the church to which the part of the epistle to the Philippians which is of Pauline origin is addressed.

# I. -- Pauline redaction.

What in the said epistle belongs to Paul is reduced to about thirty verses divided into five groups with which we must first become acquainted.

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The first group includes, in addition to 1 and 2, verses 1, 12-18. Paul "informs" the Philippians of his situation. He is a captive in Rome. In the Praetorium, and even elsewhere, they want to know why he is deprived of his freedom. And when they learn that it is because of Christ, they ask about him. It is true that the information given is not always dictated by sympathy, and that it sometimes tends to create difficulties for the apostle. But the apostle sees only one thing: that his captivity has made known "the cause of Christ" to a crowd of people who did not yet know it, and that, in short, it has "turned to the advantage of the gospel".

What is this "cause of Christ" that is mentioned here only by way of allusion? Paul was telling the Jews that God's promise to Abraham would soon be fulfilled through Christ; he was explaining that, in accordance with this promise, the Jewish people would soon be delivered from the Roman yoke and that the ancient kingdom of Israel would be restored. This is the cause of Christ which is now being discussed in Rome, which is being judged differently, but which is no longer ignored.

1. See Letter to the Romans, p. 16.

The second group consists of verses 1,25-26, in which Paul declares his conviction that the matter of his captivity will turn out well and that he will be able to return to Philippi.

The third group covers II:19-III:1, minus II:20-21 which will be studied later. It is mainly about Epaphroditus. This "apostle", that is to say this delegate placed by the Philippians at Paul's disposal, has conscientiously fulfilled his office; he has served Paul even to the point of death. But he had just suffered a serious illness, after which he was overcome with longing. Paul sends him back to his country and asks that he be welcomed. At the same time he tells the Philippians that he will soon send Timothy to them to hear from them. And again he expresses the conviction that he will soon be able to go to Philippi himself.

To the fourth group belong the two verses IV, 2-3. In the first, Paul urges the two women, Evodius and Syntyca, to stop their quarrelling and to be reconciled. In the second, he addresses an intermediary and asks him to work at this work of reconciliation.

Verses IV, 2-3 raise two questions. First, a question of date. When Paul wrote them, he had just recently been informed about the situation in the church at Philippi, since he is concerned about

the quarrel of two women in that church and is considering how to put a stop to it. Now, in II, 19-Π, 1 written to commend Epaphrodite to his countrymen, he announces to the Philippians that he is going to send Timothy to them to hear from them. So he had not received any for a notable time. Let us conclude that the two pieces II 19-III, 1 and IV, 2-3 belong to two different letters and have been artificially put together by the editors so as to form a single epistle.

Second question. Who is the intermediary to whom Paul addresses himself in IV, 3? The expression he uses to designate him, *gnesia sunzughé*, means, according to the translations, "faithful companion". But Clement of Alexandria, alluding to our text, said (*Stromates*, III, 52): "Paul does not hesitate in an epistle to greet his wife". And Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.*, III, 30) quotes this extract as an authority. Clement and Eusebius, we see, are convinced that the word *sunzugos*, even accompanied by an epithet in the masculine, designates a wife. They knew Greek. One can thus think that their interpretation is in rule with the claims of philology. If we accept it, we will not be embarrassed to identify the "faithful wife" of which the text speaks. Let us take the information that Acts XVI, 14-15 gives us about Paul's first stay in Philippi:

A woman named Lydia, a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who feared God, listened and the Lord opened her heart to listen to the words of Paul. When she and her household had been baptized, she said to us, "If you judge me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and stay there. And she constrained us, *parabiasato emas*.

Whether it was the Lord or some other cause that "opened the heart" of Lydia, what is certain is that this woman took it into her head to have Paul under her roof, and she succeeded. Paul stayed with Lydia. This is what the book of Acts tells us, and this is all it tells us. But experience tells us more. It teaches us that the human heart has its laws, and that certain situations bring with them inevitable consequences. Paul lived in intimacy with Lydia. With her he paid his tribute to nature. In doing so, he did not violate any commitment, he did not offend any prejudice. He had therefore nothing to hide. He did not need to have recourse to the cabalistic signs which the correspondence of Mazarin with Anne of Austria presents to us, to the mysterious manners which Bossuet employed with M<sup>U</sup>e de Mauléon, to the half-reservation to which the cardinal de Boisgelin believed himself bound in his correspondence with the countess de Gramont. Addressing Lydia, he gave her the title which their former relations authorized. Here is where the translation patronized by Clement of Alexandria and Eusebius leads. Here is the wife that these two doctors saw in IV, 3, but which they did not bother to identify.

However, the translation of Clement of Alexandria and Eusebius did not succeed in imposing itself. Adopted in the sixteenth century by Erasmus, Lefèvre d'Étaples, Gajetan, Catharin and, in our days, by Renan (who, moreover, identified the wife with Lydia, *Saint Paul*, p. 148) it was rejected by the very great number of the critics who, more often than not, do not even mention it. And it is not difficult to see the cause of this discredit. It does not correspond to the mystical exaltation with which Paul is supposedly animated in his epistles. It is contradicted by Paul's own words which, after having allowed marriage to the Corinthians, he adds (I Cor., VII, 7): "I

would that all men were like me". It goes without saying that these objections are of no value to us who, behind the mystical texts encountered so far, have recognized a fictitious Paul.

The fifth group is formed by IV, 10-22 (from which we must probably discard 13). Paul declares that he has received the subsidies which the Philippians sent him through Epaphroditus, and he thanks them for it, not without discreetly letting them know that they have been a little late (10) and that, in any case, they will be able to start again (14). It is generally recognized, following Ambrosiastre and Erasmus, that 18 must be translated: "I have received all" [what you sent me]. It is thus well an acknowledgement of receipt which he gives, at the same time as a discharge for Epaphroditus who served as commissioner. It is in the nature of acknowledgements of receipt to be given as soon as possible. Paul must therefore have seized the first favorable opportunity to send his. But perhaps this opportunity was long in coming? Let's listen to Paul. "I am in abundance" or what amounts to the same thing "I am overflowing". He has not yet consumed the provisions he has received; he has barely begun to eat them, if he has even touched them at all: the reception of the offerings has just taken place.

It just happened. And so. Epaphroditus, the commissioner, has recently arrived near Paul; he has left Philippi only a few days ago, and he was able to give the apostle fresh news of his church. Now in II, 19-III, 1, Epaphroditus, who has been in Paul's service for a considerable time, returns to his country following a serious illness, and Paul prepares to send Timothy to the Philippians to get news of them. Our two texts are at odds. And, since their historicity cannot be suspected - what interest would a forger have had in making them? - they respond to different situations. The comparison of IV, 2-3 with III, 1 had already led us to a similar result.

Let us conclude that the Pauline redaction of the epistle to the Philippians comprises at least two distinct letters, one in which Paul thanks the Philippians for the offerings they have just sent him through Epaphroditus, the other in which the apostle gives leave to Epaphroditus himself, desirous, after a long service and a serious illness, to return to his family. This second letter, to which I, 12-18 and II, 19- III, 1 belong, was written by Paul in Rome during his captivity. As for the first letter, which consists of IV, 1-6 and IV, 10-22, we would have an approximate point of reference if we knew when Epaphroditus entered Paul's service. We do not know this. We can only conjecture that this took place, not in 48 when Paul first left Philippi after a stay of a few weeks, but in 58. By this time Paul had reached middle age. The Philippians, seeing him go away from them for the second time, may have thought it would be useful for him to have a devoted servant on hand. In this hypothesis, Epaphroditus, who embarked with the apostle in 58, would have, a few months later, made an appearance at Philippi, from where he would have left with provisions for Paul, and the acknowledgement of receipt which immediately followed would be of 59.

I have said that the piece IV, 2-3 belongs to the letter IV, 10-22. This is probable but not certain. These two verses could have been a separate bill written between 47 and 58. In this case the Pauline redaction would comprise three letters.

## II. -- Marcionite redaction.

### 1. Christ has the appearance of a man.

Let us now turn to another series of texts. And first let us study II, 1-11 where Christians are urged to take their model from Christ, to do for one another what Christ has done for them all. So what has Christ done? Instead of looking upon his equality with God as a prey that cannot be relinquished, he stripped himself of it. And what was the end of this stripping? Here a deep disappointment awaits us. We thought that the author was going to mention the incarnation of the pre-existent Christ; we expected to find either the formula of the Fourth Gospel "The Word became flesh", or that of the symbol "He became man". Instead, what do we read? That Christ took "the form of a slave", that he became "in the likeness of men", that he had "the appearance of a man". Why not simply say that Christ became a man? What is the ulterior motive behind these cautious turns of phrase?

Naturally, theologians and critics reassure us over and over again. With touching agreement they affirm that our text obviously speaks of the incarnation of Christ and that it does not hide any trap. The thing seems so clear to them that they do not think it necessary to waste their time in providing explanations. But whether they like it or not, when one says that an object resembles gold or silver, one necessarily supposes that it is neither gold nor silver. And when one says that Peter has, by his features, the appearance of Paul, one clearly implies that Peter is not Paul. Language has its laws, from which only the demented and the aged are freed. Unless he belongs to one of these two categories of sick people - and there is no reason to suspect that the author does - he must be considered an opponent of the incarnation of Christ, who wrote that Christ, on coming to earth, became "in the likeness of men" and that he had "the appearance of a man". He did not believe in the incarnate Christ, but he believed in a God Christ who, without becoming man, took on a human appearance.

Now it happens that this doctrine is precisely 1 of the fundamental dogmas of Marcionism. It happens that the Christ who "became in the likeness of men", the Christ who "has the appearance of a man" corresponds exactly to the spiritual Christ of the Marcionites. The worker who forged these formulas has left his signature. He is the disciple of Marcion, he wrote around 140 to spread the maxims of his master. And, to give these maxims the authority of Paul, he attached them to the bills of this apostle. We will soon point out in 6-9 some catholic corrections. Leaving aside these reworkings, 1 Oracle II, 1-11 was written by an apostle of the spiritual

Christ. And, since it is part of a dissertation beginning at I, 27 and ending at II, 18, we are entitled to conclude that the whole dissertation is of Marcionite origin.

## 2. All seek their own interests.

Let us now turn to II:19-24 where Paul announces to the Philippians that he intends to send Timothy to them soon. He takes this opportunity to praise his disciple, saying (21): "All of them [except Timothy] seek their own interests and not those of Christ Jesus.

In the presence of this formidable blow, the first question that arises is to whom it is addressed. We would like to think that it is directed at unbelievers or, at most, at Judaizers. But the context opposes this benevolent interpretation. Paul says in substance: "I intend to send Timothy to you. He is the only one I can trust, for all the others are knights of industry. He contrasts Timothy with all the others he could send, who would like nothing better than to leave, but whom he does not trust. These others are those who surround him, who have accompanied him on his tours, who still work with him. And here are all his companions, all his collaborators put in the pillory!

No doubt commentators tell us not to take this stigma literally. They warn us that the word "all" means "many" and that the fault of the culprits is only that they have an imperfect purity of intention. But these charitable interpretations assume a brain disease in the author, which would have taken away the meaning of the words and led him to express the opposite of his thought. This is not the case. The accusation made here is not the product of an infirmity of mind. It is the work of hatred, a violent but enlightened hatred. Let us say first of all that it cannot emanate from Paul. The leaders of men are optimistic. They are optimistic first of all because of their situation and then because of diplomacy. They are the last to see their failure and when they have seen it, they are the last to admit it.

Paul had the mentality of a leader of men, the mentality of a chief. He could fall out with one of his subordinates, he could see a defection and suffer for it, but he could not disown his troops en bloc, wrap them up in a global dislike and communicate this dislike to all the faithful in the city of Philippi. The note II, 21, to which it is necessary to associate 20 which prepares it, was inserted in the letter of Paul by a foreign hand. Who is this hand, if not the one that has just written a plea in favor of the spiritual Christ? In Marcion's house, the Catholic clergy was abhorred. It is the Catholic clergy around 140 that is stigmatized here. And both verses II, 20-21 have the same author as the essay I, 27-11, 18.

## 3. The circumcised are us.

In III:11 we read a violent diatribe against the Jews. They are called dogs, bad workers. The circumcision of which they are proud is only an amputation (katatomé), we would say today a

tattoo. True circumcision is among Christians who worship God in spirit, who put their glory in Jesus and not in the flesh: in other words, true circumcision is spiritual.

In saying this, Paul cannot be suspected of obeying a feeling of jealousy, since he received the Judaic circumcision, since he is a Hebrew from the tribe of Benjamin. And in the past he was proud of his origin. But now he knows that the so-called advantages he used to glory in were actually losses. To know Christ, to know that his resurrection is communicated to us, to unite ourselves to his passion, to conform ourselves to his death, to try to reach the resurrection of the dead: everything is there.

This is what we learn from the oracle III, 16-11. Now, in the epistles to the Galatians and to the Romans, Paul does not know two circumcisions; he knows only one, which is the Jewish circumcision. And if he makes the trial of this circumcision, it is not to oppose it to a spiritual circumcision of which it would be only a caricature, it is to say that circumcision has not abolished the promise to which it is posterior, and that the hope of the Christian rests entirely on the promise with which Abraham was once gratified. Our essay is foreign to Paul's horizon. On the other hand, considered in its second part, it has a very pronounced family resemblance with chapter VI of the epistle to the Romans, which teaches us that the Christian participates in the death of Christ and also in his resurrection. But this theological lesson was, as we know, written by an apostle of the spiritual Christ. Our oracle has the same origin. The Christ whose knowledge it celebrates is the spiritual Christ. And "the resurrection of the dead" that he mentions is that which takes place in this life, when the Christian transformed by faith participates in the heavenly life of Christ.

#### 4. The enemies of the cross.

In III, 17-IV, 1 Paul, after offering himself in imitation of the Philippians, begs them not to follow the example of certain men who, by their conduct, "are enemies of the cross", who have their stomachs in their mouths, who think only of earthly things, while the Christian's home is in heaven. He has in the past "often" denounced these men; here he denounces them again, "with tears", to warn the Philippians not to be led astray by them.

The "enemies of the cross" referred to here are clearly Christians, not unconverted Gentiles or Jews. These Christians are enemies of the cross, not because they deny the death of Christ on the cross, but because their conduct does not respond to the mystery of redemption. In other words, the enemies of the cross mentioned here are Christians who live in pleasure, that is, bad Christians. On the other hand, these bad Christians remain in Philippi, since Paul asks the Philippians not to imitate their conduct. But they are in a separate group, since Paul's letter is not addressed to them. There are therefore two groups of Christians in Philippi who live separately from each other. In one are the good Christians who are Paul's friends and to whom

Paul writes; in the other are the bad Christians about whom Paul speaks with tears, but to whom he does not write. And this is an old situation, since "often" in the past Paul has warned the good Christians against the bad ones.

Let us now think of Corinth. There too there are Christians who live as enemies of the cross, as the following text proves (II Cor., XII, 21): "I am afraid that when I come to you again... I will have to groan when I see that many of those who have sinned will not have been converted from impurity, fornication and debauchery. So some Christians in Corinth spend their lives in debauchery and filth. What is the situation of these unworthy Christians? One of them, the incestuous one whose fault scandalized the pagans themselves (I Cor., V, 1), was struck with a temporary exclusion, then he was reinstated on the order of Paul himself, who feared that a too great severity would have disastrous consequences (II Cor., II, 5-11). As for the others, we are informed on their account by the text II Cor. XIII, 1-2, where Paul threatens to crack down on them during his next journey. These debauchees, who continue to languish in vice, will perhaps be expelled when the apostle goes to Corinth. In any case, no sanction has yet been taken against them, and the one that may eventually be imposed on them will be temporary, if they correct themselves, since the incestuous one himself has been granted respite. Moreover, this repugnant person would never have been struck down without the energetic intervention of Paul, whom the Corinthians obeyed, but reluctantly and with a grumble.

In short, the legal situation of the debauched Christians of Philippi has nothing in common with that of the debauched Christians of Corinth. This contrast, which could not really exist, is the result of a fiction. The "enemies of the cross" that our text denounces are to be found around 140: they are the Catholics. The good Christians, who are exhorted not to let themselves be seduced by the bad examples before their eyes, are the members of Marcion's family. The fictitious Paul who warns them against the seductions of vice belongs to the same family. And if he reminds his brothers that the Christian's home is in heaven, it is because with Marcion the entrance to heaven was placed immediately after death.

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The commentary contains the observations required for I, 1 b, 3-11 and I, 19-24.

### III. - Catholic redaction

Let us return to the oracle II, 1-11. It speaks of the coming of Christ on earth, and we have seen in what terms it speaks of this. But it also speaks of Christ's sojourn in heaven, of the sojourn which preceded his coming among men, of the sojourn which followed his death on Calvary. Before coming down to earth, Christ "was in the form of God" and had "equality with God". When Christ returned to heaven after his death on the cross, "God exalted him and gave him a name above every name," so that "Jesus Christ is Lord.



Let us stop in front of these formulas. The first two are singularly twisted. If the author believes that Christ, before coming to earth, possessed divinity, why does he not simply say that Christ was God? The alam-biquitous expressions he uses are such as to arouse our suspicions. Suspicions that soon become certainties. We learn that Christ, after his return to heaven, was "raised" by God who gave him the title and function of "lord", that is to say, master of the world. The Supreme Being cannot climb the ladder of perfections, since he possesses them all; and he cannot be promoted to the dignity of "lord" or master of the world, since the world is his work. Christ, who, on his return to heaven, was "raised" by God, who, as a reward for his devotion, received the empire of the world, is undoubtedly a very august personage, but he does not possess the divinity. Since he does not possess divinity after his return to heaven, he did not possess it either before coming to earth. The "form" of God, in which he was then, must therefore be understood in the sense of a way of being, which gave him the external appearances of divinity without giving him the reality of it. And the "equality with God" which he enjoyed was a generic equality analogous to that which exists here below between the child and his father (see below, p. 30).

Christ, considered during his double stay in heaven, has only the appearance of divinity. On the other hand, during his stay on earth, he had only the appearances of humanity. This is the result to which the study of the texts has led us. And this result brings us face to face with an enigma whose solution is to be found in the state of Christology in the century from about 130 to 240. Two schools are fighting over it. On one side are Justin, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Origen (with whom we must associate the author of Hebrews, see below, p. 122); on the other, Marcion and his disciples, the first editor of the Fourth Gospel, the first editor of the Ignatian Letters, and then the Church of Rome. In the first school it is agreed that Christ is God; but it is also taught that, considered before his coming to earth and outside his human nature, Christ is the subordinate of the Father of the universe, the executor of his will; he is even denied eternity. In other words, the divinity of Christ is only accepted in word, but the thing is rejected. And this state of mind continued, for it was only with Augustine that the Catholic Church arrived at the absolute divinity of Christ, that is, at the identity of the divine nature of Christ with the nature of the Father.

1. See Coulange, *Le Christ alexandrin*, in *Revue d'Histoire et de Littérature religieuses*, 1913, p. 337.

In Marcion the picture is different. There it is taught that Christ is the good God himself who, wanting to tear men away from the yoke of the evil God, came to earth with the appearance of a human body. The Marcionite Christ says: "I and the Father are one"; "He who has seen me has seen the Father"; "I am in the Father and the Father is in me". From about 130 the Marcionite school professed the absolute divinity of Christ, while long afterwards, half of the Catholic Church, attached to a Christ whom it proclaimed to be a god while denying him true divinity, was in an impasse from which Augustine, the first, by prodigies of sophistry, managed to free it.

There are thus, since around 130, two rival Christologies which compete for the Christian conscience. Let us say now that both of them gave themselves appointment in the oracle II, 1-11 and that the amalgam which resulted from it confused all. If we separate them in our thinking, everything becomes clearer. The Christ who has only taken on the appearance of humanity, who is therefore spiritual, is the good God of Marcion. The Christ who, as a reward for his devotion to mankind, has been "raised up" and established as master of the world by God, is the Catholic Christ. The Marcionite editor could not fail to make a very clear profession of faith in the absolute divinity of his Christ, and he had to give the text II, 6 more or less the following tenor:

He who, being God, did not consider his divinity as a prey that one refuses to let go of.

His redaction continued in 7 and 8, and then passed from there to 12. The Catholic editor came some twenty years later and did a double work of addition and correction on the Marcionite redaction. The addition consisted in inserting verses 9-11 where Christ is rewarded by God. The correction concerned 6, whose original profession of faith has been blurred. The Catholic editor has substituted Christ, who, being God, did not make his divinity a prey to be refused, for Christ, who, being in the form of God, did not make his equality with God a prey. The "form of God", i.e. the appearance of divinity, is an imitation of the "slave form" of the Marcionite Christ, who had the appearance of human nature. As for the equality with God, in order to understand it, one must put oneself in the school of the Greek Fathers Athanasius, Basil, Gregory of Nyssa who teach that the Son is equal to the Father, but who understand this equality in the generic sense 1.

1. Coulange, *Métamorphose du Consubstantiel*, in *Revue d'Histoire et de Littérature religieuses*, 1922, p. 169.

The commentary will point out another Catholic interpolation in III, 20b-21.

In summary, the epistle to the Philippians is a course in Marcionite theology, into which two or three bits of Paul to the Philippians have been incorporated, and which has been neutralized later by three Catholic glosses.