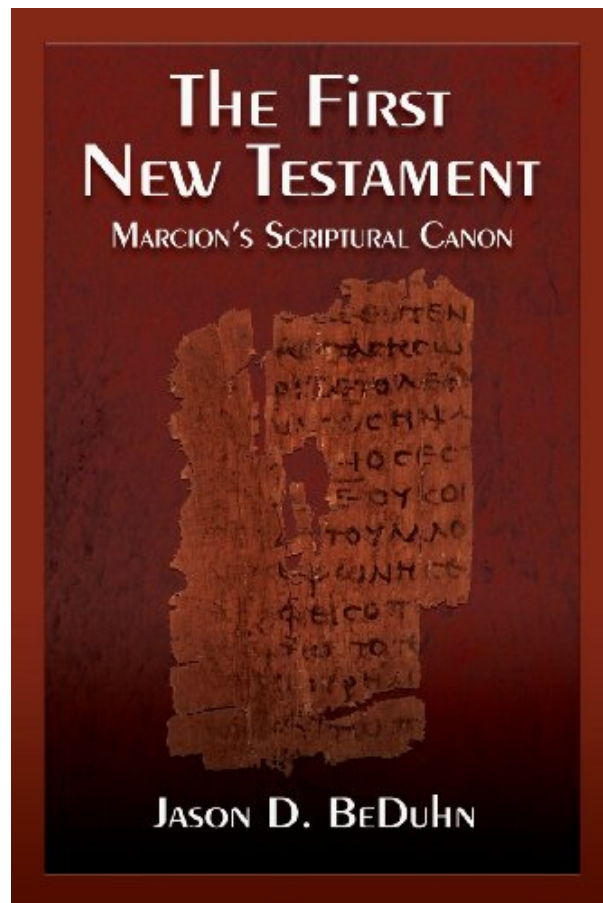


THE FIRST NEW TESTAMENT: MARCION'S SCRIPTURAL CANON BY JASON D. BEDUHN



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Review

In this bold undertaking, Jason BeDuhn sets forth, for the first time, a complete English translation of the Bible of Marcion. With a useful introduction to all relevant issues, a readable translation of this First New Testament, and copious notes supporting each textual decision, BeDuhn has provided a work of scholarship that is sure to be both welcomed and controversial. For historians of early Christianity, this will be a book to be reckoned with. --Bart Ehrman, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

A comprehensive and impressively documented scholarly study of Marcion's original compilation of sacred scriptures ... an essential contribution to personal and academic Christian Studies collections. --Midwest Book Review

This is an important book that fills a large gap in the resources needed for the study of second-century Christianity and Marcion in particular. It is an exhaustive examination of the relevant sources and a masterful, methodologically sensitive, treatment of Marcion's significance. --Joseph B. Tyson, professor emeritus, Southern Methodist University

About the Author

Jason BeDuhn is Professor of the Comparative Study of Religions at Northern Arizona University, a Guggenheim and National Humanities Center Fellow, and author of *The Manichaean Body* (2000, winner of the American Academy of Religion Best First Book Award), *Truth in Translation* (2003), *Augustine's Manichaean Dilemma* (vol. 1 2010, vol. 2 2013), and *The First New Testament: Marcion's Scriptural Canon* (2013).

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The earliest version of the New Testament, now in English for the first time!

History preserves the name of the person responsible for the first New Testament, the circumstances surrounding his work, and even the date he decided to build a textual foundation for his fledgling Christian community. So why do so few people know about him? Jason BeDuhn introduces Marcion, reconstructs his text, and explores his impact on the study of Luke-Acts, the two-source theory, and the Q hypothesis.

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Dr. BeDuhn's thesis regarding Marcion

By The Old Prof

Dr. Jason BeDuhn wants to reset the discussion on the earliest New Testament entitled “The First New Testament: Marcion’s Scriptural Canon.” It is a well-known phenomenon that humans tend to attach semantic over-layers of meaning to the words they use and then, when discussing the topic at hand, those meanings get in the way of trying to explore that topic objectively. Such modern use of terms thus becomes an anachronism. Therefore, because Marcion is seen as a heretic today, Dr. BeDuhn prefers to use “Old Contract”/“New Contract” in place of Old Testament/New Testament or Old Covenant/New Covenant. He does this with other words as well “trust” instead of “faith.” “John the Washer” instead of “John the Baptizer” or “John the Baptist.” “Emissary” rather than “Apostle.” This approach is especially important because when we discuss Marcion and want to come at the topic with a fresh and objective approach, we do not want to be saddled with the accoutrements of the discussions we have inherited from past research assumptions—especially those developed since Adolf von Harnack and others that have been made regarding Tertullian’s and Epiphanius’ statements about Marcion. Dr. BeDuhn argues that both Marcion’s text and (what later became known as “orthodoxy”) the Catholic texts, may have come from pre-existing proto-texts of the Evangelion and Apostolikon used by Marcion. He suggests that just perhaps Marcion made his interpretations based upon texts in use within Christian communities already in existence. But he wants to open up the field to re-examine and re-evaluate the assumptions made by earlier scholars about what Tertullian, Epiphanius and other sources actually said about Marcion.

BeDuhn provides the reader with a good introduction to Marcion’s Evangelion and Apostolikon along with text notes for each. Each of these texts are reconstructions and scholars will find various and sundry points for which they each might offer different treatments. He points out that whereas the Evangelion has a better basis for creating a more objective case, the Apostolikon is less well suited to this simply because the more ancient sources did not provide the sound foundation modern scholars wish to have to build their case.

But BeDuhn is not arguing that textual evidences for individual books did not exist prior to Marcion’s texts. He is saying that Marcion developed the first CANON—that is, sacred collection—of New Testament texts. (He tries to convey this by his book title). Another reviewer has used material from the discussion of the Dead Sea Scrolls to question BeDuhn’s work. But scholarship has called into question the fragmentary “findings” from Qumran and are not, as yet, settled on the certainty that New Testament texts were actually found there. Until that has been settled, Dr. BeDuhn’s thesis should be made available to students of the New Testament until it has been thoroughly evaluated by other specialists in the field.

The book ends with copious chapter notes, an extensive bibliography, and finally a topical index. I believe that BeDuhn is a careful and cautious scholar and that his thesis deserves a detailed investigation. This book, then, is a valuable contribution in that direction. Let’s call it a new beginning—not an ending!

12 of 12 people found the following review helpful.

DeBuhn’s “The First New Testament” is like manna from heaven

By Daniel N. Gullotta

I would like to express my thanks to Polebridge Press for supplying me a review copy of this book.

Jason D. BeDuhn’s (Northern Arizona University) work is another addition in the recent renewed interest in the second century figure Marcion of Pontus. What makes BeDuhn’s work stand out is its interest in Marcion’s role in the development of the Christian canon and a modern reconstruction of Marcion’s version of the New Testament, that is, the “first New Testament.”

In a common sense fashion, BeDuhn structures his work beginning with a brief study of Marcion as a second

century figure, followed by a detailed explanation of Marcion's version of the New Testament and the sources he intends to use in order to reconstruct its contents and order. After introducing readers to the two key texts within Marcion's New Testament, *The Evangelion* (a gospel-narrative about the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus) and *The Apostolicon* (a collection of letters allegedly written by the Apostle Paul to various churches), BeDuhn then offers his English translation and reconstruction of them, accompanied with an extensive list of notes and comments.

BeDuhn offers a good amount of information about the scholarly interests in Marcion, from the 19th Century to the present day. For people who have never really engaged the life, thought, and importance of Marcion with early Christianity, BeDuhn's introductory chapters are ideal reading. For students of Christian origins in particular, BeDuhn does a fine job in introducing some of the key academic figures within Marcionite research and their thoughts regarding Marcion, such as Adolf von Harnack, R. Joseph Hoffmann, and Sebastian Moll. As well as this, BeDuhn presents the more complex theories and figures associated with Marcion, textual criticism, the canon, and the formation of the New Testament (such as those of Johann Salomo Semler and Albert Schweigler) in a very approachable manner.

More importantly however, BeDuhn establishes the complexities and difficulties entrenched with researching anything associated with Marcion, due to the nature of the sources at scholars' disposal. Nonetheless, BeDuhn familiarizes readers with the key texts to be engaged with when studying Marcion and his New Testament and the problems with them, for example Tertullian's *Against Marcion* [*Adversus Marcionem*] and Epiphanius' *Medicine Chest* [*Panarion*]. All throughout, BeDuhn's language is clear and concise, presenting complicated ideas, theories, and sources in a manner that is both accessible and engaging. Simply put, given that so many texts about Marcion (in any sense) are either extremely expensive, long out of print, or incredibly dense, BeDuhn's *The First New Testament* is like manna from heaven.

Not being a textual critic, I am not adept enough to pass judgment on the quality of BeDuhn's reconstruction and translation of *The Evangelion* and *The Apostolicon*. Some of BeDuhn's wording is particularly striking for well versed and traditional trained Biblical readers, such as "The Human Being" instead of "The Son of Man" and "emissary" over "apostle." However such change does add certain freshness to the reading. The entire body of *The Evangelion* and *The Apostolicon* read very easily and flow from the page in a manner that many will find engaging thanks to BeDuhn's translation into English. Due to the nature of the *The Evangelion* and *The Apostolicon*, they will read like uncanny pieces of literature to anyone familiar with the Synoptic Gospels or the Letters of Paul, however due to the differences within them, Marcus Borg's phrase "reading the Bible again for the first time" does come to mind in describing the reading experience one might have.

Given the wealth of notes included in *The First New Testament*, it is definitely the sort of book that will require serious students to undergo multiple reads and in-depth notations to fully grasp the reasoning behind BeDuhn's reconstructions and translations of *The Evangelion* and *The Apostolicon*. However, it should be noted that while most of the endnotes provided by BeDuhn are references to sources and arguments in support of his work, there is also plenty of fascinating comments made that will no doubt lead to more speculation about Marcion's thought and the shaping of the New Testament.

In my view, BeDuhn's studies into Marcion are not designed to be exhaustive or definitive, but rather act as a spring to propel students and scholars into more research but with equipped questions. This is particularly clear as BeDuhn's reverses several sections within his work for the "Implications for Biblical Studies." What does *The Evangelion* mean to the future of the Synoptic Problem? How does *The Evangelion* relate to the Gospel of Luke and the Q document? What is the relationship between Marcion's *The Apostolicon* and the "catholic" editions of the Pauline corpus? What was Paul's legacy like in the second century and how can

The Apostolicon aid us in our research in figuring out this complex question? DeBuhn is well aware that his work offers an extraordinary amount of questions about Paul's legacy, Marcion, and the birth of the New Testament. DeBuhn's *The First New Testament* challenges a lot of the assumptions people have made about Marcion and his version of the New Testament and forces readers to engage Marcion beyond the black and white apologetical norms of "heresy" and "orthodoxy."

When one stands back and takes in the sheer amount of research and work that certainly went into *The First New Testament*, it is certainly impressive. One only needs to look at its reviews by some of the world's leading scholars to see just how extraordinary a work it is. DeBuhn's *The First New Testament* is a remarkable edition to the study of Christian origins. It will unquestionably become necessary reading for anyone interested in diving into Marcionite research and studying yet another fascinating aspect of the Christian canon's birth.

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

Brilliant, Enjoyable Read About Marcion's New Testament

By Jonathan Brillhart

This book is very scholarly, but is written in a very accessible, readable style. It is brilliant. Marcion is absolutely fascinating. It seems he was one of the most important figures in the development of early Christianity. Although churches were established throughout the Roman empire by his followers, almost nothing is said about him today. The orthodox (Catholic) church fathers destroyed all his writings, and today nothing remains but the extensive writings about him by his critics. I have not finished the book yet, but apparently it is not going to say much about Marcion's Christian philosophy. The book focuses on Marcion's New Testament rather than his beliefs. I hope there is a book out there as well written, researched and thoughtful as this one is, about Marcion's beliefs.

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